

LE CLAVECIN FRANÇAIS



François Couperin
Quatrième Livre de
Pièces de Clavecin (1730)

Davitt Moroney, Harpsichord





François Couperin (1668 - 1733)
Quatrième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin (1730)
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Disc 1

Vingtième Ordre • Nicolas Dumont 1707

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. La Princesse Marie, <i>Gracieusement, sans lenteur</i> | 3:15 |
| 2. La Boufonne, <i>Gaillardement</i> | 2:05 |
| 3. Les Chérubins ou L'aimable Lazure, <i>Légèrement</i> | 3:01 |
| 4. La Croûilli ou La Couperinéte, 1 ^{re} Partie
<i>Delicatement, sans vitesse</i> | 4:17 |
| 5. La Croûilli, Seconde Partie, <i>Naivement</i>
<i>with John Mark Rozendaal, viola da gamba</i> | 3:02 |
| 6. La Fine Madelon, <i>Affectuëusement</i> | 3:04 |
| 7. La douce Janneton, <i>Plus voluptueusement</i> | 3:12 |
| 8. La Sezile, Pièce croisée, <i>Gracieusement</i> | 2:51 |
| 9. Les Tambourins, <i>Tres legerement</i> | 1:28 |

Vingt-unième Ordre • Ioannes Ruckers 1627

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| 10. La Reine des Cœurs,
<i>Lentement, et tres tendrement</i> | 4:17 |
| 11. La Bondissante, <i>Gajement</i> | 1:55 |
| 12. La Couperin, <i>D'une vivacité modérée</i> | 4:41 |
| 13. La Harpée, <i>Pièce dans le goût de la Harpe</i> | 3:25 |
| 14. La Petite Pince-sans rire,
<i>Affectueusement, sans lenteur</i> | 2:21 |

Vingt-deuxième Ordre • Joannes Goermans 1768

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|---|------|
| 15. Le Trophée | 1:38 |
| 16. [2] Airs pour la Suite du Trophée | 2:44 |
| 17. Le Point du jour, Allemande,
<i>D'une legereté modérée</i> | 3:08 |
| 18. L'Anguille, <i>Légèrement</i> | 3:19 |
| 19. Le Croc-en-jambe, <i>Gayément</i> | 2:07 |
| 20. Menuets Croisés | 2:39 |
| 21. Les Tours de Passe-passe | 2:50 |

Total Time

61:21

Disc 2

Vingt-troisième Ordre • Ioannes Ruckers 1635

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|--|------|
| 1. L'Audacieuse | 3:30 |
| 2. Les Tricoteuses, <i>Tres légèrement</i> | 2:12 |
| 3. L'Arlequine, <i>Grotesquement</i> | 1:51 |
| 4. Les Gondoles de Délos, <i>Badinage-tendre</i> | 8:39 |
| 5. Les Satires, Chevre-pieds,
<i>Gravement ferme, et pointé</i> | 4:44 |

Vingt-quatrième Ordre • Ioannes Ruckers 1627

- | | |
|--|------|
| 6. Les Vieux Seigneurs, Sarabande grave,
<i>Noblement</i> | 3:46 |
| 7. Les Jeunes Seigneurs,
<i>Cy-devant les petits Maitres, Légèrement</i> | 4:09 |
| 8. Les Dars-homicides, <i>Gayement et coulé</i> | 2:52 |
| 9. Les Guirlandes, <i>Amoureusement, sans langueur</i> | 5:07 |
| 10. Les Brinborions, <i>Gayement</i> | 4:18 |
| 11. La Divine-Babiche ou les Amours-badins,
<i>Voluptueusement, sans langueur</i> | 6:05 |

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|--|------|
| 12. La Belle Javotte,
<i>autre fois L'Infante, Tendrement</i> | 1:11 |
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|---|------|
| 13. L'Amphibie, mouvement de Passacaille,
<i>Noblement</i> | 5:38 |
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Total Time	54:04
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Disc 3

Vingt-cinquième Ordre • Ioannes Ruckers 1635

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|--|------|
| 1. La Misterieuse, <i>Modérément</i> | 5:48 |
| 2. La Visionaire, <i>Gravement, et marqué; viste</i> | 3:20 |
| 3. La Monflambert, <i>Tendrement, sans lenteur</i> | 2:18 |
| 4. La Muse Victorieuse, <i>Audacieusement</i> | 2:53 |
| 5. Les Ombres Errantes, <i>Languissamment</i> | 4:08 |

Vingt-sixième Ordre • Nicolas Dumont 1707

6. La Convalescente	6:12
7. Gavote	2:06
8. La Sophie	3:03
9. L'Épineuse, Rondeau	6:27
10. La Pantomime, <i>Gayément et marqué, et d'une grande précision</i>	3:53

Vingt-septième Ordre • Joannes Goermans 1768

11. L'Exquise, Allemande	5:02
12. Les Pavots, <i>Nonchallamment</i>	7:23
13. Les Chinois	3:09
14. Saillie, <i>Vivement</i>	2:55

Total Time 58:39

Executive Producer: Karen Flint

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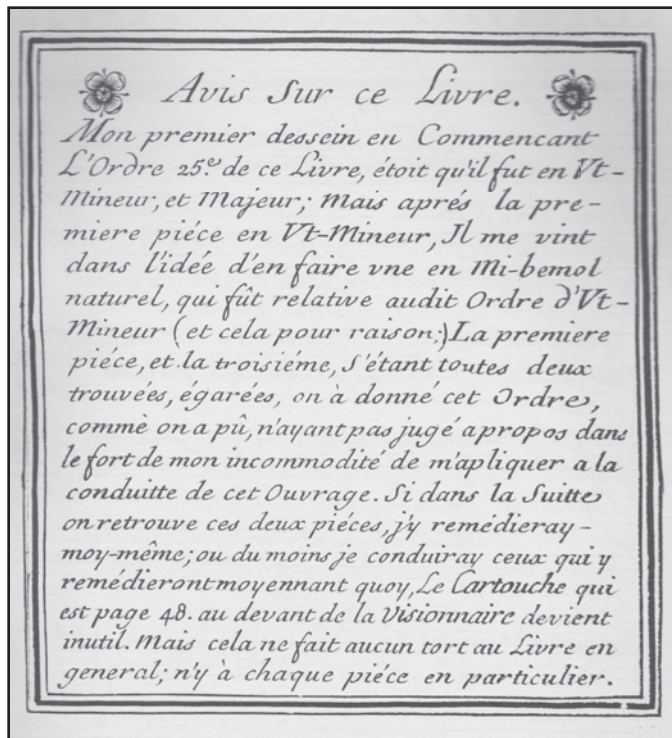
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Note concerning this Book, Quatrième Livre

What makes Couperin Couperin?

Davitt Moroney

François Couperin (1668-1733) published his fourth and last book of harpsichord pieces, the *Quatrième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin*, in 1730, three years before his death on 11 September 1733. It contains eight *Ordres* and turned out to be his last publication of new music. In his remaining years he nevertheless reprinted several of his earlier collections and also renewed the copyright (*privilège*) that he had first taken out in 1713 to secure for 20 years the rights on his own published music.

His decision to undertake such reprints in his last years, and under the new copyright, may have been motivated by a hope that a stockpile of sellable books might provide some future income for his heirs, who would now gain whatever profits might still occur until 1743. His widow, Marie-Anne Ansault, renewed it again in 1745, for twelve more years. These renewals are unique among keyboard volumes of the period. They are a clear sign of the huge impact Couperin's four books of harpsichord music had

had, and were still having, years after his death. Alongside the financial reasons, he also had another motivation to make sure his works stayed in print: François Couperin was very conscious of how posterity would regard his legacy. He need not have worried.

He explained in the preface to the Fourth Book that its contents had been ready for three years, so we know that everything had been composed by 1727. Ill-health seems to have been the major issue that delayed the book's appearance. In 1723 he had handed over his post as organist at the Parisian church of Saint-Gervais to his younger cousin Nicolas Couperin (1680-1748), who had already been acting as his deputy. As for his post as court harpsichordist, which he had long hoped to acquire and had finally won the right to only in 1717, he signed that over in 1730 to another cousin, Nicolas's sister Marguerite-Antoinette Couperin (1705-c.1778), the first—and only—woman to have ever held this post. He retained right until his death his main post as Organist to the King in the royal chapel at Versailles; the job was well paid but required his presence for only the first three months of

each year, the cold winter quarter he had inherited from his mentor Jacques-Denis Thomelin. He no doubt relied increasingly on a deputy in his last years, much as he is thought to have deputized in his youth for Thomelin.

The first two books of harpsichord pieces had been dedicated to eminent wealthy patrons, but the fourth, like the third, contains no dedication. At such a late stage in his illustrious career Couperin needed no “protector” and could presumably cope with the heavy costs involved in the engraving and printing. He again called on the artistry of the meticulous engraver of the first two books, François du Plessy. There is, once again, a very high level of attention to detail in the physical presentation of the pieces. The engraving is visually and technically superb, the quality of the layout and ornamentation is as high as in the three previous volumes. The book was printed on high-quality paper.

The single plate used to print the preface seems to have been engraved by Claude Auguste de Berey (?1651-1732), who had produced the magnificent plates for the front matter in Couperin's previous harpsichord volumes. Berey

normally signed pages he engraved but in this case he did not; however, his style is recognizable. It must be one of his last pieces of work since he was almost eighty and died two years later, just before Couperin himself.

The composer's last preface is unusually short and personal, just one paragraph of touchingly valedictory prose that reminds us that Couperin had his eye firmly on his posthumous reputation. "These pieces have been finished for about three years, but since my health diminishes day by day my friends have advised me to stop working, and I have not composed any major works since then. I thank the members of the public for the approval that they have been kind enough to grant my works up until now, and I believe I have earned it in part, by the zeal with which I have tried to please them. Since almost no one has composed more than I have, in different styles, I hope that my family will find in the papers I leave behind something to make them miss me, if such sentiments of regret mean anything after life. But one has at least to have this idea to try to deserve the shadowy immortality to which almost all men aspire."

It was presumably right at the end of the production process, when the book was ready to go to press, that an additional page of front matter was added *in extremis*, entitled "Note concerning this Book" (*Avis sur ce Livre*). It was engraved by du Plessy rather than Berey and identifiable by du Plessy's characteristic little flowers added as ornaments to the engraving. It brings us face-to-face with the effects of Couperin's long final illness. He had lost some pieces and (no doubt despite searching extensively for them) had to resign himself to printing the book without them, since he could no longer compose replacements. "My first idea in beginning the 25th *Ordre* was that it should be in C minor and major; but after the first piece in C minor I had the idea to write one in E flat major, the relative major key for such an *Ordre* in C minor (and for a good reason). The first and third pieces having both been lost, we have printed this *Ordre* as best we can, not having thought it appropriate, due to the gravity of my illness, to work at this composition. If we later find these pieces, I will remedy the defect myself, or at least I will direct those who will remedy it for me, and at that point

the little text [*Cartouche*] on page 48, at the start of *La Visionnaire* will become invalid. But it does no harm to the book in general, nor to each individual piece.”

The *Cartouche* at the start of the 25th *Ordre* (which for some strange reason was removed in later reprints) reads “As this *Ordre* is in C minor, it is good to play the following piece [*La Misterieuse*] before this one [*La Visionnaire*] because of the modulation.” Failing to do that means that an *Ordre* in C major and minor actually starts in E flat major, a tonal aberration. The two missing pieces have never surfaced and we do not know what their titles were. It seems fair to conclude that they were both in C minor. Their absence also threw out the pagination of the book, resulting in the necessity of including a blank page at the end of the *Ordre*. (Another one occurs in the middle of the next *Ordre*; in his earlier days Couperin would have composed a piece to fill in this space as well rather than leave it blank.)

I have therefore followed Couperin’s own recommendation and placed *La Misterieuse* at the start of

the 25th *Ordre*, which is now anchored in C, starting in the major and ending in the minor, but has Couperin’s planned excursion to E flat major for *La Visionnaire*. It is interesting to note that he seems to have thought that adding a piece in the relative major inside a group in the minor is a novel idea. If so, he had forgotten that Nicolas Le Bègue had already done this in his second harpsichord book (1687), placing a Gavotte in B flat major inside a set of pieces in G minor.

* * *

Having now finished recording all of Couperin’s 27 *Ordres*—over 250 pieces—I find myself trying to identify what makes his music so compelling. Those of us who love it know it is special, but not everyone perceives what makes it so personal, so uniquely Couperinian.

One of the earliest musicians in modern times to understand his character was Claude Debussy (as Denis Herlin has recently shown in a fascinating article about Debussy’s multiple links with Rameau and Couperin). Debussy’s search for French roots in his own art reached a

long way back into the history of French music. He calls Couperin a poet and a *devineur*. The second word is hard to translate: a searcher for something, as a water diviner searches for water, someone who guesses, or who perceives the solution to an enigma. This certainly homes in on something essentially Couperinian, but it does not explain how he achieved it in his music. What makes this music that of a *poète* or a *devineur*?

Debussy refers to the works of early eighteenth-century French harpsichordists as having a “profound grace” (*grâce profonde*), which he elsewhere associates with “a natural simplicity that we no longer know” (*un naturel que nous ne connaissons plus*). He also mentions “emotion without paroxysm” (*émotion sans épilepsie*), referring to the fact that such French art relies on understatement rather than uncontrolled Romantic outpouring. Even more perceptive, he refers to this music’s “slyly voluptuous perfume” (*parfum sournoisement voluptueux*) and its “fine unavowed perversity” (*fine perversité inavouée*). These comments are highly evocative and show that Debussy understood something fundamental about the musical universe of

François Couperin. But they do not really bring us very much closer to understanding how Couperin is different from the other excellent French harpsichord composers.

It is not easy to summarize the central elements in what might be called, in French, his “*couperinéité*”, but in the remainder of this text I will try to identify a few of the main features that I find particularly notable in his music. I think consciously about these things and try to draw the listeners’ attention to them as I perform. I pay particular attention to these elements that strike me as being so essential to Couperin’s art. Most of them are not unique to Couperin, and there are many more than I have space for here, but his particular combination of these musical ingredients helps me define the parameters of his musical personality. (In the following section, the number of the *Ordre* in which each piece mentioned occurs is given in parentheses after the title.)

1) *Couperin's themes are often memorable melodic fragments and can seem naïve; he uses little turns of phrase that stick catchily in the mind.*

Perhaps as a result of his well documented love for Italian music, he had a knack for memorable little melodies, a gift that escapes many of his French contemporaries. He had a popular side to him, the melodic tastes of normal people, not the more precious fancies of aristocrats at court, and this is heard in his little tunes, many of which are easy to whistle. By no means everything in his music is about powdered wigs and courtly etiquette.

Couperin had a naïve side to him—fake naivety, perhaps, but not incompatible with directness. He may have been a man of the court at Versailles by profession, but was not at all by upbringing. The family came from farming stock in the countryside. For him the pleasures of the countryside were not some mythical pastoral vision, but direct familial experience. He lost his father at the age of nine, and didn't have the benefit of any solid education except in music. His pupil Nicolas Siret, a provincial

organist, called him a “perfectly honest man”, which is a strong statement in French—*parfait honnête homme*—underlining something noble about his unpretentious moral straightforwardness.

Couperin sometimes instructs us, rather knowingly, to play “naively”. So it is a self-conscious naivety, not really naïve at all. Many of his pieces seem to smile openly and to mean frankly exactly what they say. There is a guileless simplicity to this honesty and it is linked to the shortness of the catchy phrases. Good examples are *La Pastorélie* (1st Ordre), *La Manon* (1st), *Les Pélerines* (3rd), *Les Moissonneurs* (6th), *La Galante* (12th), and *Le Petit-Rien* (14th). Less naïve, more subtle: *La Voluptueuse* (2nd), *Les Bergeries* (6th), *Sœur Monique* (18th), and many other pieces in the same style.

With many tunes, it is easy to imagine words to them, and indeed poets of his time did add texts to quite a few of them, creating *parodies*, which were often intended as tributes. Couperin refers (perhaps ironically) to these unidentified writers as “famous poets” in the preface to his

Third Book. He is the harpsichord composer for whom the most vocal *parodies* survive, and this fact is clearly connected with the singability and memorability of many of his phrases. These melodic phrases frequently outline precisely an octave span and are thus not only rather singable but also fall naturally under the fingers. Many movements in the 9th *Ordre*, for example, are of this sort: *La Rafraichissante*, *L'Olympique*, *L'Insinüante*, *La Séduisante*, *Le Bavolet flottant*. Others, notably *La Castelane* (11th), the *Marche* from *Les Fastes* (11th), *L'Intîme* (12th), and *La Galante* (12th), also show the same characteristic.

2) *There is a rich harmonic palette in terms of chords and dissonances used.*

All good composers of the period use a wide variety of chords so there are no harmonies found in Couperin that do not occur elsewhere in the works of his French contemporaries. Like others, he exploits unusually expressive sonorities, including the typically French harmony using the 9th combined with the augmented 5th. However, he does have a predilection for certain ways of using particularly characteristic chords.

What makes Couperin's chords special is the care with which he puts them together, with minutely adjusted harmonic inflections. The notes of the rich chords are not always sounded together; they can depend on sustained notes hanging over from a previous chord. The rich sonorities are thus often not hit on the head but are allowed to happen more persuasively, as dissonant notes coalesce quietly and then dissolve softly in their harmonic resolutions.

With many composers, dissonance has a strong sometimes even violent effect in their music. Couperin was less interested in the attack of dissonances, although the end of the *Sarabande la Majestueüse* (1st) shows he could handle them with great originality. More often, his dissonances are like quiet aches that can be massaged away by fluid musical phrasing, in gentle movement. A good example is his musical self-portrait, *La Couperin* (17th), where few strong dissonances are sounded but almost every measure has dissonances that are like little twinges, that instantly evaporate.

Some of his most striking harmonic moments are thus evanescent, appearing mistily and then disappearing, like perfumes of which you catch a whiff yet they are gone before you can identify them. Another way of putting it is to say that dissonance in Couperin's music is often not a cause of emotional crisis or paroxysm; instead, it is more like a vaguely disturbing low level of anxiety or tension, ever present (even in essentially cheerful pieces). A good case is the wonderful *Les Tours de Passe-passe* (22nd), one of Couperin's finest creations. For almost all the piece only one note ever sounds at a given time. Yet increasingly complex harmonies build up and swirl delicately around inside the harpsichord's resonances. Through their misty agency we perceive from afar a rich harmonic world that is evoked far more than it is sounded.

3) *Couperin's music often slips into slinky chromaticism, but in small understated doses.*

He often has a unobtrusive approach to chromaticism. Notes foreign to the scale of the main key of a piece are regularly introduced even when they have no harmonic

function. They have no implication of modulation to another key because they are immediately contradicted. This is a feature he shares with (and possibly derived from) his uncle Louis Couperin. Chromatic inflections provide sentiment rather than harmonic direction. They add color (the strict etymological meaning of the word "chromaticism"). They gently subvert the solidity of the tonality, like a shading, and usually bring an unexpected touch of minor to a sunny major context, casting brief doubt.

For example, in the *Allemande à deux Clavecins* (9th), in A major, towards the end of the second phrase, the music is heading for an E major chord (the dominant), but suddenly there is a turn to E minor, with G naturals. This turn to the minor has no structural reason, harmonically, and the passage would have been perfectly fine with G sharps (if a bit more ordinary). It is just a shading, expressed quietly, like a cloud over the sun, casting doubt on the bright E major in the next measure, but the cloud brings no rain.

In *Sœur Monique* (18th), the rationally “inexplicable” E flat in the bass at the end of the 2^{me} Couplet is immediately contradicted by the arrival on a C major chord, but it lingers in the memory, undermining the clarity of the C major. Something similarly slippery happens in the opening two phrases of *Le Réveil-matin* (4th). These little gestures in the music are like quiet sighs; they almost always come about through the flattening of a note, and provide a gentle (if short-lived) release of tension.

4) He had a taste for false relations, delicately handled, and for other normally avoided simultaneities.

Dissonance and chromaticism both collide in false relations, where two different versions of a note coincide vertically (harmonically) due to the different horizontal (melodic) requirements of two musical lines: C natural and C sharp, or B natural and B flat. By Couperin’s generation such sonorities were usually avoided by most composers.

One of Couperin’s most expressive direct false relations occurs in *Les Idées Heureuses* (2nd), considered to be his

signature piece since he chose it to figure in his portrait. Near the beginning of the second half, a rising B natural in the bass is heard at the same moment as a falling B flat in the top part. Another occurs in the second half of the *Sarabande la Dangereuse* (5th), where an unusually high and exposed G natural must be sounded expressively against a G sharp in the bass. Both these “wrong notes” are fragile sonorities. They are indicated by the very small notes that Couperin calls “little lost notes” (“*petites notes perduës*”), but they are really cases of sonorities that have been carefully found, not lost. More subtle, and less rare, are false relations that are almost simultaneous but not quite, such as those heard fleetingly in *Les Papillons* (2nd).

Another unusual sonority that was normally avoided by composers, and rather difficult to handle at the compositional level, involves doubled sharp notes (for example, doubling the major third). Couperin shows how to use it to good effect in, once again, *Les Papillons* (2nd). In *La Muse de Monaco* (15th), he uses it first with the doubled F sharps in bar 7, and then more daringly with the doubled leading note, G sharp, six bars from the end,

which is cunningly rendered acceptable by the parts crossing in contrary motion. These moments offer secret little pleasures. The player is aware of getting away with breaching the normal rules of counterpoint. We are in good hands because Couperin knows how to get into trouble but also how to get out of it innocently. It is as if he is saying “You see? We can quietly break these silly rules, like this!” So we become complicit in his minor transgressions and feel drawn into a curious intimacy.

Something like this must surely be at work in the cases where he smuggles in, under the contrapuntal radar screen, the greatest of all offenses against the rules of counterpoint: parallel fifths. These can be heard (but need to be looked hard for on paper, being more audible than visible) in *Les Fauvêtes plaintives* (14th) and *La Reine des Cœurs* (21st), among other places. (Bach does something equally sly in the Sarabande at the end of his sixth harpsichord partita, BWV 830.)

Another anomaly involves strings of unprepared (and unresolved) fourths against the bass. This is an eyebrow-

raising license that causes conscientious players to run to check the source to make sure they are not wrong notes. But Couperin manages to pull these passages off, and he usually presents them more than once, even repeating them immediately (“Yes! I really did mean that!”) so he must have liked the sound. It is not something found among his contemporaries. These strings of hidden “6/4 chords” work their way sneakily into the music in *La Pateline* (4th) and *La Villers* (5th), for example, and elsewhere. The way Couperin insists on repeating the passages shows he really meant them, enjoyed them, and wanted them to be appreciated for their special flavor. Hearing them allows us to identify a distinctly Couperinian flavor, and provides us with the pleasure, perhaps elitist but no less enjoyable, of sharing something known to only a few.

5) A variety of chordal positions and inversions gives diversity to his sound world.

In some of his most charming pieces, Couperin’s bass lines proceed predominantly by stepwise motion. Examples

from Book One are the *Sarabande la Prude* (2nd), *La Voluptueüse* (2nd), *La Bandoline* (5th), *La Flore* (5th), *Les Agréments* (5th). This produces a characteristically French tendency to avoid the Italianate model, derived from Corelli, where the bass is more likely to provide root positions of chords, with the harmonic root of the chord in the bass. In Couperin's music, the tendency to move by stepwise motion creates more chords that are not in root position, and is seen especially in mid-phrase, with larger leaps in the bass occurring naturally at the cadences. It is one of the ways he keeps a phrase floating without letting it sit down until it reaches its end.

The rare cases where we can observe how Couperin worked to improve a composition—in other words, pieces for which an early version and a revision survive—show that his harmonic improvements go in the direction of harmonic subtlety and variety of chord positions. This was something he worked at consciously.

The early song version of *La Pastoréle* (1st), published in 1711 two years before the harpsichord version, is much more straightforward than the latter one. Once we know

that, we can more fully appreciate the little changes he made to the bass line, in particular. The first Courante in the fourth *Concert royal* (1722) is a keyboard version of the second Courante in the 10th *Concert* from *Les Goûts-réünis* (*Nouveaux Concerts*), a collection that appeared only two years later, in 1724 ; but the *Goûts-réünis* version almost certainly antedates the one found in the *Concerts royaux*. Once again, comparison reveals the little details that Couperin thought important to change.

6) *Melodic and harmonic oscillations are a feature of his language.*

Linked to the use of step-wise movement of the bass are passages where a whole phrase seems to oscillate back and forth, both melodically and harmonically. They involve short passages, sometime just two notes, or two chords, that are repeated, sometimes more than once, as if the music hesitates before going on. Some early examples are found in *Les Graces Naturelles* (11th) and *La Fileuse* (12th).

Many pieces do of course have a strong forward drive and I am not trying to minimize their importance. Strong

driving pieces from just Book Four include *La Trophée* and *L'Anguille* (22nd), *L'Audacieuse* and *Les Satires Chevre-pieds* (23rd), *L'Amphibie* (24th), *La Visionnaire* and *La Muse Victorieuse* (25th), *La Pantomime*, (26th), and *Saillie* (27th). Such drive seems natural and is expected. It is a strength. Yet other pieces are quite different, and they have sections that seem, momentarily, to lack this forward drive. So is that a weakness?

I don't think so. The pieces that hesitate include some of Couperin's most characteristic works. Again, just from Book Four: *La Fine Madelon* (20th), *L'Anguille* (22nd), *L'Arlequine* (23rd), *Les Guirlandes* and the last section of *Les Brinborions* (24th), *La Misterieuse* and *Les Ombres errantes* (25th). These work all have brief moments of hesitation, repeated phrases that seem to tread water or put the brakes on for a moment. Such hesitations are an essential part of Couperin's style and are the antithesis of stylistic arrogance. They give their pieces a touching diffidence that is a rare treasure in such well-composed music.

One of my favorites is the curiously halting passage in the second half of *La Misterieuse* (25th) where the music hesitates mysteriously over which direction to take: B flat? No, B natural! No, B flat! No, B natural!—and all this in a phrase that starts and ends in A minor. There is something touching and humble about this indecision.

7) Couperin had an organist's understand of parts and voice leading.

His harpsichord music is often basically in two parts, a principal melody and a bass line, with regular use of filler chords in either hand that escape polyphonic identification. This is standard enough for French harpsichord music and is a texture already well established in Chambonnières's works. In Couperin's Book One, the first three pieces are of this sort, the *Allemande L'Auguste* and the two *Courantes*; many of the more expressively melodic pieces such as the *Sarabande Les Sentimens* (1st), and *Les Regrets* (6th) are similar.

Strict three-part writing throughout is rare. *Les Fauvêtes plaintives* (14th) is an exception, and this fact argues (along

with its unusual clefs) for it having perhaps been originally composed for flutes, or similar instruments. *L'Attendrissante* (18th), *Les Pavots* (26th), and the *Gavotte* in F sharp minor (26th) are similar, being almost entirely in three parts. In these four pieces, two parts are in the right hand and one in the bass. This is a texture derived from the *Trios avec deux dessus et basse* that are a standard feature in French organ literature of the late seventeenth century, and found in Couperin's own early organ masses that were composed before he was 21. The texture also occurs in the last *Couplet* of *L'Enchanteresse* (1st) and in *La Reine des Cœurs* (21st).

Occasionally two parts are given to the left hand rather than the right, leaving the right hand free to play a highly ornamented melody (and no doubt free physically to play it on a different manual): *Les Moissonneurs* (6th), *La Langueur sous le Domino violet* from *Les Folies françaises* (13th). This texture is also found in Couperin's organ music (notably in the *Récits*). Less strict in its approach to trio writing is a piece like the *Gavotte* in C minor (3rd) where the thinking is essentially in three

parts throughout, but the parts are treated flexibly with the middle voice floating between the hands.

Four-part textures are even rarer. *Les Baricades mystérieuses* (6th) gives two parts to each hand, using wider spacings of the harmonies more familiar from organ writing than harpsichord writing.

8) *Unusual textures abound; they are often more complex than expected.*

It is not surprising that it should be *Les Baricades mystérieuses* that has a notably unusual texture. This is not merely because of its four voices, although (as Olivier Baumont kindly pointed out to me) its defining textural element is the presence of the Tenor, a fourth voice that is never essential in terms of the writing and could easily have been omitted (creating a three-part texture like Daquin's more pedestrian *Les Enchaînements harmonieux*).

What Couperin did here was comparable to what Bach did with the arpeggiated first prelude to the *Well Tempered Clavier* (BWV 846) making something unique out of something quite ordinary. Bach wrote a similar but shorter

prelude in C major (BWV 924) for his young son Wilhelm Friedemann about the same time, but it is a completely banal little exercise, being in four parts (one in the left hand, three in the right).

The more famous prelude in the WTC expands the texture to five parts by giving an extra inner voice to the left hand, adds the special arrangement of the arpeggiation figure in which only the three right-hand notes are repeated (so the eight notes are grouped 2+3+3), all of which is repeated. The prelude has no clear melodic element and has a completely static rhythmic nature, yet the subtle realization of the figuration allows the harpsichord to develop sound in a unique manner. Similarly, with *Les Baricades*, there is no clear melodic element or rhythmic diversity. The harmonies are not especially interesting in themselves (except in the wonderful last section), and yet the texture, with the added Tenor part in the left hand, which is mostly syncopated, creates something quite unique.

Both Bach's and Couperin's pieces have something magical about them; it is hard to put your finger on what

makes such apparently simple pieces so effective. I would say that Bach's achieves an almost Couperinian grandeur.

The low textures of pieces like *Les Sylvains* and *L'Enchanteresse* (1st Ordre), *La Garnier* and *Les Idées Heureuses* (2nd), *La Lugubre* (3rd), *La Bandoline*, *La Flore*, *L'Angélique* and *Les Ondes* (5th)—all from the Book One—have often been commented upon. But at the end of his life Couperin also particularly exploited the rather high register, as can be seen from many pieces in Book Four. *Les Chérubins* and *La Fine Madelon* (20th), *La Petite Pince-sans-rire* (21st), *Les Tours de Passe-passe* (22nd), *Les Gondoles de Délos* (23rd), *Les Vieux Seigneurs* (24th), *Gavote* (26th) and *Les Pavots* (27th) are all situated unusually high in the keyboard, giving a particularly ethereal quality to the music.

9) Couperin had a predilection for delaying important stresses until the end of the phrase.

Sometimes pieces start with a strong beat, assertively. This is true for the first piece of Book One, the *Allemande*

L'Auguste, and for many of the pieces in the standard dance forms inherited from the seventeenth-century harpsichord suite. But in his more modern pieces Couperin is also very fond of avoiding a strong beat as long as possible. The phrases often start in mid flight instead of being launched by the impetus of a strong beat. They glide as long as possible before landing at a cadence.

Again, this is true of the first piece in his new style, in the very first *Ordre*, namely *Les Sylvains*. In the same *Ordre*, *Les Abeilles* (“the bees”) hovers around, buzzing, with quiet little ornaments, hardly settling until the end of the first half, like bees industriously visiting various flowers. The last piece of the same *Ordre*, *Les plaisirs de Saint Germain en Laye*, is similar. In the second *Ordre*, the portrait piece *La Garnier* (no doubt written for his colleague the organist Gabriel Garnier) is the first that clearly exploits this feature in almost every phrase. *Les Idées Heureuses* is another.

Here we have something definitely Couperinian. It is very common in his music, found throughout all four

books. In Book Four, for example, *L'Arlequine* (23rd) dances his touching little grotesque dance in just this way, only reaching stasis at the eighth bar. *Les Ombres errantes* (“The wandering shades”) exploits this feature, with the opening phrase wandering, precisely, for four measures before reaching a point of repose. In *La Couperin* (17th), which is presumably his self-portrait, every one of the phrases is of this sort, floating in the air, surging forward breathlessly, seeking resolution, before finding the ground.

10) He uses expanded phrase lengths, especially in the second halves of bipartite pieces.

This is a feature of the works of many composers in the early eighteenth century, notably Bach and Handel. But the point here is that previous French composers of harpsichord music often wrote the two halves of their pieces with more or less equal length. This suited the smaller format of the books used at the time, allowing players to turn the page in the middle of a piece. But Couperin's compositions usually have a second half considerably longer than the first. In the first book alone, *La Terpsicore* (2nd) *Les Idées Heureuses* (2nd),

La Diligente (2nd), *Le Réveil-matin* (4th) and *La Logivière* (5th) all have unusually long second halves, making impractical both the normal page size and a page-turn in the middle of the piece.

That is one reason why he adopted a monumental format—his books are twice as big physically as those of most of his predecessors. The other reason was connected with his fondness for the rondeau form, which also became impractical in the smaller format because of the need to keep turning back to repeat the opening phrase. In his monumental folio format, that problem was solved by having twice as much music on each page, or rather the equivalent of four small pages on two big facing pages.

David Fuller drew attention thirty years ago to Couperin's use of lengthened phrases, in a revealing analysis of the last section of *Les Agréments* (5th) from Couperin's first book. The piece contains one of the most striking long paragraphs in all of Couperin, where the expected cadences are repeatedly delayed, interrupted and waylaid, resulting in a phrase of extraordinary length.

On its repeat, where yet another final extension is added, the phrase totals nearly 40 bars combined into a single musical arch. This kind of spinning out of the musical line is typical of the second halves of pieces, where ideas from the first half are extended and reworked, through different keys and different harmonizations.

Traditionally, this kind of process is referred to as “development” in Germanic music from Bach onwards, but the concept of “extension” is perhaps more appropriate for Couperin's music. We see it already in the first *Ordre*. In the first piece in which he breaks out of the traditional format of the seventeenth-century French suite, *Les Sylvains*, most of the phrases are two or four bars in length, but the second half of each of the two parts ends with climactic 12-bar phrases, as a result of Couperin's “extension technique”. Examples from Book Four where this is easy to hear are the last phrase of *La Boufonne* (20th), in which most of the phrases are of two or four bars but the last one is extended to twelve, and *Le Croc-en-jambe* (22nd), where the last phrase is extended to eleven bars.

I also believe that he used his ornamentation to spin out melodies and keep them in the air. Part of the secret of this has been completely obscured in recent years by an entirely modern habit that is unjustified by reference to Couperin's own writings, and indeed contradicted by them. This approach, which I consider to be fundamentally misguided, involves performing one of his tiniest ornaments in a way that is not in accordance with his expressed intentions. Couperin refers to this ornament, like the false relations mentioned earlier, as a "little lost note" (*petite note perdue*) but here it occurs between two notes, the first of which falls on a strong beat and the second of which is a third below the first. The little "lost" note lightly fills in the gap as the music moves from a strong beat to a weak one. Couperin's notation is extremely meticulous about this third-filling ornament. Only when it is slurred to the first note is it supposed to be between the beats. For the vast majority of its occurrences, however, it is slurred to the second of the pair, meaning it is supposed to fall exactly where the second note should begin, rather like an *appoggiatura* (yet different in function).

Since the early 1970s it has become almost universally adopted practice to play the ornament before the beat, as if it were slurred to the first note of the pair. Throughout this recording I have in almost every case—and this ornament occurs hundreds and hundreds of times—performed it on the beat not before it. This has a subtle yet transformative effective of avoiding the chopping up of longer lines into smaller units. The lines are more often spun out, and just when you think the phrase is over, on it goes, thanks to the placing of this little ornament. Tiny though it is, it is a powerful tool for projecting Couperin's melodic lines, that are thus revealed to be more sinuous.

The whole topic deserves a much larger study, despite this being such a tiny ornament. It is found in almost every single piece, usually many times. Its effect on what might be called the pronunciation of Couperin's music is omnipresent. The result is clearly audible in the very first piece of Book One, the Augustan-style *Allemande L'Auguste* (1st), whose melodic discourse is allowed to unfold more slowly, more expansively, when the ornaments are performed as Couperin says they should be.

This discourse can give the music a lofty rhetoric worthy of the classical French Augustan age of the late seventeenth century. Voltaire referred to literature from the early eighteenth century as being “Augustan” and English writers such as Oliver Goldsmith later used the term for the period of English literature that preceded the age of the Sentimental Novel, inaugurated with Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740). Such writings relied on drawing emotion and sentiment from the readers.

It is surely no coincidence that the Age of Sentiment and Sensibility in English literature had its precursors among French writers, and that Couperin’s Augustan opening to his very first *Ordre* should be called *L’Auguste* and be followed shortly after by a magnificently stately first Sarabande, *La Majestueüse*, and then by a quite different second Sarabande in the new style, called *Les Sentimens*. This piece on its own symbolizes the start of the Age of Sentiment in harpsichord literature. Couperin’s music is thus perfectly identified as being on the cusp between the end of a French Augustan Age of the end of Louis XIV’s

reign and the dawn of a new French Age of Sensibility, namely the *Régence* and the early years of Louis XV’s reign.

11) *Characters and characterization*

It is well known that Couperin conceived some of his works as “character pieces” and “portraits”. It is hard for us to understand now the effectiveness of the characterizations, having little knowledge of the personalities of the people he represented. Some portraits are obvious, when they carry the name of what Couperin calls the “friendly originals” (*aimables originaux*), but many others probably hide behind names that now seem mysterious. Apart from appreciating the identified portraits of members of the royal family, and of certain musician friends—for example *La Forqueray* (17th)—more and more people are gradually emerging from the shadows. One such case is the magnificent Allemande *La Logivière* (5th), which must surely refer to the same Monsieur de Logivière who owned the copy of Marin Marais’s third book of viol pieces (1711) currently in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (catalogue: Vm7 6270a).

But there is another side to characterization. Couperin used a uniquely wide range of terms to describe how performers should play pieces. Huguette Dreyfus drew attention to the vast list of all these terms, but I would like to concentrate here only on the most striking ones, leaving aside the more standard indications of speed. These turn out to be all to do with sentiment. One of his favorite instructions is to play not just “tenderly” (*tendrement*) but “tenderly, without slowness” (*tendrement, sans lenteur*).

It is profoundly Couperinian to combine contradictory elements like this. He also does it with the instructions to play “lovingly” and “voluptuously”. Playing tenderly, lovingly, or voluptuously might be thought to imply dallying (or at least dalliance), for who could wish to rush tenderness, love, or voluptuousness? Yet Couperin insists in many pieces on not spending too much time over it. In other words, he indulges but is not indulgent. His music exists poised in perfect equilibrium on this fine line.

No other composer tells us to play majestically (*majestueusement*), nonchalantly (*nonchalamment*), lovingly

(*amoureusement*), gallantly (*gallamment*), affectionately (*affectueusement*), gracefully (*gracieusement*), languishingly (*languissamment*), heavily (*pesamment*), naively (*naïvement*), imperiously (*impérieusement*), proudly (*fierement*), flowingly (*coulamment*), uniformly (*uniment*), agreeably (*agréablement*), nobly (*noblement*), cheerfully (*gaillardement*), painfully (*douloureusement*), delicately (*délicatement*), grotesquely (*grotesquement*), voluptuously (*voluptueusement*), and audaciously (*audacieusement*). Most of these instructions occur more than once, and they can be modified in some way—very delicately, very tenderly—or qualified by a contradictory restraint that puts the brakes back on at the very moment we have been authorized to indulge.

12) Couperin had a keen sense of his own worth.

We see this in his texts, whether the prefaces or passages in *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin*. As noted above, in the preface to Book Four he refers specifically to the fact that no one composed in as many different styles for the harpsichord as he did; elsewhere he has biting words for his critics.

He went to great pains to publish his harpsichord pieces in monumental volumes, twice the size of almost all previous harpsichord books. They thus took their place on library shelves, and still do, beside the large folio publications of full scores of Lully's operas. This vision of his own works also extended to publishing certain chamber works in full score rather than in separate parts. In the preface to the *Apothéose de Lulli* (1725) he noted "I will continue publication of my works in the format that I have used for previous volumes, for the convenience of those who want to have them bound in a single volume." Couperin thus had a private vision of his complete works bound in large compound volumes, in monumental folio format, sitting on library shelves. (That took exactly 200 years to happen, since the first monumental modern edition of his Complete Works, in twelve large and luxurious volumes, was published by Éditions de l'Oiseau-Lyre in 1933, in time for the bicentenary of his death.)

He could not have imagined what a complete set of recordings of his harpsichord pieces would look like. I suspect he would have been disturbed by the disembodied

nature of modern digital formats, available for download. Such availability reduces his achievement to the mere sounds of his music, fragmented into separate "songs" that can be orphaned by being separated from their parent *Ordre*. Part of his achievement was also the magnificent volumes, meticulously engraved in revolutionary ways, at great expense of time and money, with an unprecedented attention to detail of notation and layout.

The modern product inevitably deprives his life's work of the physical monumentality that paralleled and embodied the "shadowy immortality to which" he said, clearly thinking of himself, "almost all men aspire." But we cannot turn the clock back, so we must move forward, trying to understand as clearly as possible that his creative achievement was greater than can be represented by any recording, just as no single performer can ever explore all the possible worlds opened up by individual pieces.

* * *

It is not difficult to reconcile Debussy's perceptions with all these features. Couperin is someone who leads us in a

direction, points out the way, and then steps discreetly into the background. He evokes emotions rather than indulging them. He paints tender, witty portraits that are almost never caricatures or unkind, even when evoking things “grotesquely”.

I noted in my text for the recording of Book Three how that volume has links with the painter Watteau and parallels with the *Embarquement pour Cythère*. As in that great painting, where we do not know whether the people are arriving or leaving, with Couperin there is often an ambiguity present. It is not just his false naivety, or his melodic lines that hesitate, or his oscillating harmonies, or his quietly subversive and unobtrusive chromaticism, or his long ethereal phrases that stay in the air magically before finally sitting down on a strong downbeat, or even his attention to the minutest details of ornamentation such as the placing of the ubiquitous “little lost note”. But these features all contribute to his being a *poète* and a *devineur*, and their counter-intuitive nature is perhaps what Debussy was referring to when he said Couperin’s music had a “fine unavowed perversity”.

It seems anticlimactic to point out that most of these features are far less present in German and Italian music of the period (or of Debussy’s period), and that perhaps what we’re talking about is essentially a kind of Frenchness, something Debussy himself was proud to express in a different manner. Surely he was talking of himself when praising the *poète devineur*, with a touch of his own *perversité*.

Couperin and Debussy both evoked something deeply human in their music, a highly personal touch, far removed from the concepts of “absolute music” that is to be perceived in the abstract, intellectual constructs to be admired perhaps more than they are loved. This touch animates Couperin’s music with a deep humanity that is immediately evident in many pieces because they are portraits or represent specific human emotions, with all their frailties, rarely expressed so generously in music. But in the end we are aware that it is Couperin himself who seems to embody this humanity and that his musical evocations define something precious not only about the human experience but also about himself.

That is why those of us who love his music so much think of him as embodying those very qualities that he tells us to draw on as players. We do so not only when trying to play majestically, audaciously, imperiously, proudly, and nobly, but also when trying to play naively, gracefully, delicately, agreeably, cheerfully and even nonchalantly or grotesquely. Yet we feel closest to Couperin when we can play lovingly, gallantly, affectionately, languishingly, painfully, and voluptuously.

Paris, March 21, 2018

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Peter and Karen Flint for the privilege of being able to perform and record on the wonderful antique harpsichords of the Flint Collection. Instead of our trying to pull these instruments towards the 21st century, we just need to relax and let them pull us back toward their time. These instruments are our best teachers, and the ideal companions for our never-ending journey with the music of the past.

D. Moroney

Davitt Moroney

Davitt Moroney was born in England in 1950. He studied organ, clavichord, and harpsichord with Susi Jeans, Kenneth Gilbert and Gustav Leonhardt. From 2001 to 2016 he was Professor of Music, University Organist, and Director of the University Baroque Ensemble at the University of California, Berkeley.

His international performing career has led him in recent years to give organ and harpsichord masterclasses at the Paris Conservatoire, the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatoire, the Juilliard School in New York, the Flint



Collection of Antique Instruments, and Oberlin Conservatory, as well as in South Korea, Finland, Belgium, and Switzerland. Other recent concerts have included recitals in Germany, Holland, Italy, England, and Scotland.

He has made nearly seventy commercial CDs, especially of music by Bach, Byrd, and various members of the Couperin family. Many of these recordings feature historic organs and harpsichords dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His recent recordings for Plectra include: François Couperin's *Pièces de Clavecin, Premier Livre (1713)* (Plectra 21201), *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin (1716)* the *Second Livre (1717)* (Plectra 21402), and the *Troisième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin (1722)* (Plectra 21602), 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 Schallplattenkritik*, 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.

John Mark Rozendaal, viola da gamba, specializes in teaching and performing stringed instrument music from the baroque and renaissance eras. As founding Artistic Director of Chicago Baroque Ensemble, he performed and led seven seasons of subscription concerts and recordings for the Cedille and Centaur labels. Mr. Rozendaal served as principal violoncellist of The City Musick and Basically Bach, and has performed both solo and continuo roles with many period instrument ensembles including the Newberry Consort, the King's Noyse, Philomel, and Parthenia. He is a member of Brandywine Baroque, Trio Settecento and the consort, LeStrange Viols.



Ioannes Ruckers (Antwerp, 1627 & 1635)

The Flint Collection of Antique Instruments

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.

Ioannes Ruckers Harpsichord, Antwerp, 1635

The 1635 Ioannes Ruckers harpsichord, originally a single-manual instrument with a 45-note (C/E-c³) range, has the unique disposition of two unison registers and an octave. It was converted to a double with the expanded range of 48 notes (C, D-c³) in about 1700 and later (possibly 1753) was extended by four notes (BB, C# & c#³, d³). The case was lengthened for the second keyboard, but it was never widened. The instrument preserves its original exquisite soundboard decoration and printed papers. Other than a restorer's signature from 1907, nothing is known of its history before it was auctioned in 1997. John Phillips restored it to its mid-eighteenth-century state in 2005.

Nicolas Dumont Harpsichord, Paris, 1707

Little is known about the life of the important Parisian harpsichord builder Nicolas Dumont (active from 1675–1707) except that he married in 1673, became a master in the instrument makers guild in 1675 and had died by

February, 1711. Four Dumont two-manual harpsichords survive, dated 1697 (Paris, Musée de la musique), c. 1700 (USA, Flint Collection), 1704 (Paris, private collection) and 1707 (USA, Flint Collection). The 1697 was originally a small Flemish-inspired instrument, since enlarged. The 1704 and 1707 instruments are the earliest examples of the standard model for eighteenth-century Parisian harpsichords. The 1707 harpsichord is the first with a five-octave (FF-e3) range.

Records of the Château du Touvet in Isère (Southern France) show that the 1707 Dumont harpsichord was purchased in 1719 by Count Pierre de Marcieu for his country estate. During the French Revolution it was tucked away in a granary where it was rediscovered in the 1970's and restored by Hubert Bédard in 1975-1976 and by Dominique Laperle in 1996. Despite 80-odd years of service, 180 years in the granary and three restorations, the 1707 Dumont remains in substantially original musical condition, with its original stand and decor. It was restrung and re-voiced in 2002, and completely restored in 2012 by John Phillips, Berkeley, California.



Joannes Goermans (Paris, 1768) & Nicolas Dumont (Paris, 1707)

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.