

# The Complete Harpsichord Works of Rameau

## Jory Vinikour



Premier Livre de Pièces de Clavecin (1706) Suite in a minor

> 1. Prélude — 3:19 2. Allemande I — 5:00 3. Allemande II — 1:49 4. Courante — 2:03 5. Gigue — 3:12 6. Sarabande I - Sarabande II — 1:33 7. La Vénitienne — 1:04 8. Gavotte — 1:56 9. Menuet — 2:39

#### Pièces de Clavessin (1724)

#### Suite in e minor

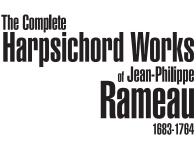
Allemande — 4:08
 Courante — 1:46
 Gigue en Rondeau I — 1:19
 Gigue en Rondeau II — 2:18
 Le Rappel des Oiseaux — 3:20
 Rigaudon I - Rigaudon II et Double — 2:09
 Musette en rondeau. Tendrement — 3:23
 Tambourin — 1:14
 La Villageoise — 2:57

19. Menuet (Method, 1724) - 0:36

#### Suite in D

20. Les Tendres Plaintes — 3:01
21. Les Niais de Sologne - Premier Double des Niais - Deuxième Double des Niais — 5:25
22. Les Soupirs — 4:13
23. La Joyeuse — 1:01
24. La Follette — 1:25
25. L'Entretien des Muses — 6:07
26. Les Tourbillons — 2:10
27. Le Lardon — 0:40
28. La Boiteuse — 1:35
29. Les Cyclopes — 3:11

30. La Dauphine (1747) - 4:04







#### Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin (1726–1727)

Suite in a minor 1. Allemande — 8:07 2. Courante — 4:24 3. Sarabande — 3:22 4. Les Trois Mains — 3:43 5. Fanfarinette — 3:11 6. La Triomphante — 1:41 7. Gavotte avec les Doubles de la Gavotte — 8:06

#### Suite in G

Les Tricotets — 2:30
 L'indifférente — 1:39
 Menuet I - Menuet II — 2:57
 La Poule — 4:26
 Les Triolets — 5:03
 Les Sauvages — 2:06
 L'Enharmonique — 6:27
 L'Éqyptienne — 3:26

16. Les Petits Marteaux (ascribed to Rameau, date unknown) - 1:46

#### Rameau's five transcriptions from Pièces de Clavecin en Concert (1741)

17. La Livri (from the first concert) — 2:53
18. L'Agaçante (from the second concert) — 1:45
19. La Timide (from the third concert) — 5:19
20. L'Indiscrète (from the fourth concert) — 1:23

21. Claude Balbastre's (1724-1799) transcription of the Ouverture to Rameau's Pigmalion - 4:24

Disc 2 Total Time - 78:25

### The early life of Jean-Philippe Rameau remains largely shrouded in anonymity.

This mystery was very much encouraged and cultivated by Rameau himself. With his first opera, *Hippolyte et Aricie*, 1733, based on Racine's tragedy, *Phèdre*, Rameau established himself, at the rather advanced age of 50 years old, as France's foremost composer for the operatic stage. Despite controversies, most notably the so-called *Querelle des Bouffons* beginning in 1752, Rameau remained highly respected until his death in 1767.



Jean-Philippe Rameau, ca. 1728

Rameau's output as a composer for solo harpsichord - five suites contained in three publications; four pieces that Rameau himself arranged from his "Pièces de Clavecin en Concert" (1741); the manuscript piece "La Dauphine" (ca. 1747), and the possibly spurious "Les petits marteaux" - must be considered among the most important in French 18th century keyboard repertoire, along with that of François Couperin. The musical and harmonic ingenuity demonstrated throughout these works, as well as Rameau's uniquely idiomatic approach to the harpsichord ensure these works a permanent place in the repertoire of all harpsichordists (and many pianists). These harmonic discoveries, as well as a handful of pieces, are to be found later in Rameau's operatic works.

Published in 1706 when the 23 year old Rameau was living in Paris, the "Suite in a minor" clearly shows the influence of the older generation of French keyboard composers, most notably Louis Marchand. Marchand, one of the greatest organists and harpsichordists in Europe, published two suites of harpsichord music in 1702. Following Marchand's example, Rameau begins the suite with a *prélude non-mesuré*. This improvisatory style has roots dating to the great French lutenists, such as Denis Gaulthier, and was further developed in the preludes by Louis Couperin. Rameau's *prélude*, one of the latest examples in French keyboard literature, begins with a noble exposition

in freely arpeggiated figures, gaining in harmonic intensity. Rhythmic motifs are gradually introduced at the end of the first section, introducing a measured, gigue-like second section.

The first of the two *allemandes* is slow and expressive, mixing purely contrapuntal and *style-luthé* textures. This is followed by a second *allemande* in a quicker tempo. The *courante*, very much in the archetypal French style, features some rather striking chromatic elements. The first *allemande* and the *courante* seem to foreshadow their more developed counterparts in the "Suite in a minor" from "Les Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin" (1726/1727).

A pair of *sarabandes* comes next - first a rather wistful minor followed by a more optimistic, delicately ornamented major. The spritely *gavotte en rondeau* is followed by an Italianate *menuet.* La Venitienne is the only example in this suite of what might be referred to as a genre or character piece. It evokes, in a pastoral  $\frac{3}{8}$  meter, a gondolier's song. Intriguingly, an isolated piece of this name, and using a similar rhythmic scheme, composed (likely before Rameau's publication) by Louis Marchand appears in a 1707 collection of harpsichord pieces by various composers.

The *gigue*, in the typical French style of dotted notes (such as the gigue from Bach's "Ouverture à la française in b minor"), is quite grand, covering much of the range of the keyboard. Broken arpeggiated patterns appearing in the second half of the piece seem to recall the measured section of the *prélude*.

It is possible to infer that the 1705 publication did not solicit great enthusiasm from the public, as few original copies survive, although it was reprinted in 1741, at the height of Rameau's fame. In any event, Rameau waited eighteen years before publishing his next collection of harpsichord pieces - "Pièces de Clavessin". The two suites which appear in this collection from 1724, e minor (and major) and d minor (and major) bear little resemblance to the first suite. The book begins with a *méthode* for the correct way of playing the harpsichord. (This recording includes the very slight and sweet *menuet* which appears in this *méthode*).

Although the shadow of François Couperin may be felt here and there, perhaps especially in the *allemande* and *courante* in e minor, and certainly in the eloquent *Les Soupirs*, the overall atmosphere is uniquely *Ramellian*.

With the "Suite in e minor", we might expect that Rameau is proposing a rather traditional suite. The opening *allemande* is quite subdued, juxtaposing melodic writing with some arpeggiated sequences evoking typical writing for the viola da gamba. The *courante* also remains well within the bounds of tradition - which takes nothing away from its grace, and subtly nuanced harmonies.

The ensuing *Gigues en rondeau*, first minor, then major, suddenly bring the listener into a more distinctly theatrical realm. The rather melancholic minor gigue is directly followed by a rambunctious, and more developed major gigue, with its distinctive descending arpeggi in the right hand, alternating with the melodic and delicate *couplets*.

Le Rappel des oiseaux (The gathering of the birds) is an illustrative piece: in strictly two-part writing, the *pincés* and flitting arpeggi, and especially the plangent tri-tones, paint a rich and vivid picture. A rather brief *Rigaudon* in the minor mode is followed by a very bright rollicking major, and then a variation in continuous guavers of the same.

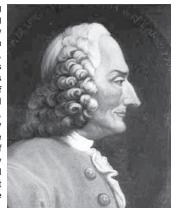
The *Musette*, which would reappear in *Les Fêtes d'Hébé* in 1739 (as would the following *Tambourin*), explores a very intimate, pastoral atmosphere, evoking a duet of soft flutes. The refrain's hypnotic melody, set over the sustained tonic in the bass, contrasts with the closely set harmony of the three *couplets*. The *Tambourin* provides a suitably fierce contrast. Although this is the only occurrence of such a piece in Rameau's harpsichord works, a goodly number are to be found in his operas, generally concluding ballet sequences.

Following this, *La Villageoise* (more or less, "The Country Girl" - or simply, "that which pertains to the village") might seem a rather surprising ending to this suite (referring to the second endnote, it cannot be clearly determined in every case what was to be the composer's intended performance order). The construction of this piece is superficially an A-B-A-C-A rondo form - that is, a *rondeau* with two *couplets*. The first significant section is formed by the A-B-A, where the simple, pastoral melody, accompanied by a left hand in broken thirds and sixths, develops seamlessly. Then, entirely new material is introduced with the second *couplet* - flowing sixteenth notes are alternated between the two hands. The initial theme is gradually reintroduced, wrapped in this new texture, and finally seems to be transfigured by its new surroundings.

The succeeding group of pieces, in d minor and D major, is presented in an altogether different manner. Although dance-like characteristics can be recognized in certain pieces, this group in no way follows the progression of dances so common in the French suite. Yet, there is a dramatic coherence linking these pieces. François Couperin, in his later *ordres* also breaks convention in this manner.

Les tendres plaintes (Sweet complaints) is a gently melancholic rondo. It appears as an *air* tendre in Zoroastre (1749). The march-like Les Niais de Sologne (The Simpletons of Sologne) begins with a deliberately naive tune set over insistent left-hand eighth-notes. These, in turn, are marked with "Notes égales". This unusual marking refers to the custom, common to 17th and

18th century French performance practice, of treating regular rhythms in certain instances in a slightly swung manner (or notes inégales). From the point of view of this writer (and performer), this marking takes on a far greater importance if we are to apply it, as well, to the first variation. Here, the notated left hand differs very little from that in the theme. Placed against this are the right hand's triplets. Following conventions of performance practice, the performer might very well choose to play the left hand in a tripletted fashion, with each note of the left hand thusly falling on every first and third note of the right hand triplets. I have attempted to avoid this effect, maintaining the idea of notes égales in the left hand. The second variation now sees the melody accompanied by brilliant, arpeggiated 16th note figuration in the left hand, ending in a brilliant coda. The first part of this piece is heard as a marche in Dardanus (1739).



The introspective *Les Soupirs* recalls François Couperin's use of the *style luthé*. Here, each minim (half-note) of the left-hand is followed by groups of three eighth-notes in the right hand, melody being implied through the subtly changing harmony. The overall effect is one of great emotional intimacy. In the brief *La Joyeuse*, the two hands seem to chase each other merrily down the keyboard. *La Follette* (possibly, "The Sprite") is a bright, gigue-like rondeau, following much the same harmonic format as the preceding piece. *L'Entretien des muses (The Conversation of the Muses*) sets a contemplative and poetic mood, with the melody always surrounded by closely set garlands of eighth notes. Rameau orchestrated the first half of this piece, and it appears as an *air tendre* in *Les Fêtes d'Hébé* (1739).

The whirlwinds of *Les Tourbillons* are the brilliant figurations, wherein the the hands rapidly cross over each other. *Le Lardon* is the briefest of menuets, whose repeated right-hand chords are shadowed by syncopated left-hand notes. "Lardon" can signify several things, most literally a small bit of lard, used in cooking. More likely, Rameau is referring to satirical gazettes published in Holland, containing sarcastic or caustic remarks (these remarks are themselves called "lardons") made against important figures (and banned in France). The plaintively winding melody of the equally brief *La Boiteuse* is accompanied by limping broken thirds.

Les Cyclopes is one of the most remarkable of Rameau's creations for the harpsichord, and one of the great virtuoso pieces of 18th century keyboard literature. Though set in rondeau form, the first return of the refrain is in a modified and abbreviated form. The theme, quite slight, is at first accompanied very simply. Brilliant arpeggiated figuration, with one hand repeating the note that the other has just played (*battéries*), follows, after which the theme is accompanied by brilliant passage work in the left hand, leaping ever farther from the repeated tonic D. In the second couplet, Rameau develops the usage of repeated notes alternated by the two hands. (the fourth variation of the *gavotte* exclusively uses this technique), evoking the Cyclops' hammers, but with the left hand jumping over the right, reminiscent of cross-hand passages to be found in certain of Domenico Scarlatti's sonatas. Rameau was particularly proud of this effect, of which he considered himself the inventor. Finally, the refrain returns in full, bringing *Les Cyclopes* - and the suite - to a brilliant close.

"Les Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin" first appeared in 1726 or 1727, according to the latest research, although 1728 was long held to be the original date of publication. Like the 1724 collection, this book contains two suites. The remarkable *allemande*, which opens the "Suite in a minor", is quite massive in scope, although of the most profoundly intimate character. Written in three-part harmony throughout, the expert use of harmonic suspensions creates a rich tapestry of sound. A coda in triplets, which descend to the depths of the harpsichord's range, ends each half. The *courante* is of similar depth and complexity. Winding scale passages are juxtaposed with arpeggiated figures, navigating through a highly original harmonic framework. The graceful *sarabande* features original and touching harmonic modulations, with elaborately scored arpeggi in the second half. This *sarabande* later appears in the opera *Zoroastre*.

Les trois mains, as the title suggests, aims to create the illusion of three hands. Although Rameau considered this effect to be his own original creation, one finds very nearly the same idea in many of the harpsichord sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti. While the right hand stays in the same register for much of the duration of the work, the left hand covers much of the range of the instrument.

The charming pastoral *Fanfarinette* is followed by *La Triomphante*, a brilliant rondeau. Attention must be paid to the highly unusual harmonic progressions in the second *couplet*. Finally, the suite closes with the celebrated *gavotte* with six variations.

Regarding the tempos of this famous piece, it is worth noting that Rameau, in the extensive preface to "Les Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin", points out that most pieces in the collection tend to be rather more quick than slow, with the exception of the *allemand*, the *sarabande*, the "*simple*" or theme of the *gavotte*, as well as *Les Triolets* and *L'Enharmonique* from the G major/minor suite.

The elegantly ornamented *gavotte* is followed by six variations in the straightforward Italian style. Here, Rameau never strays from the original harmonic structure, and the tune generally remains quite recognizable. The first three variations are strikingly similar to those of George Frederic Handel's *Air and Variations*, from the "Suite in d minor", 1720. In the first variation, semi-quaver figuration in the right hand accompanies the theme, played by the left hand. The second variation sees the hands change roles. In the third, the first variation's filigree appears as a middle voice. Breaking away from Handel's model, in the fourth variation has the right hand follows the left, restriking the notes that the left hand plays. The fifth variation has the right hand playing complex broken-arpeggio figures. Finally, in the sixth, the left hand is given the arpeggiated figures while the right hand plays the original melody.

The "Suite in G" begins with the gently playful rondeau, *Les Tricotets*. The alternating rhythmic movement of the two hands evokes the motion of knitting needles. *L'indifferente* is a suitably coy menuet in all but name.

La Poule (The Hen) is rather surprisingly symphonic in scope. With its beginning cluck - co co co co co co co co dai written over the opening melody - we might imagine a very light-hearted character piece. The simple clucking theme is developed extensively, and Rameau creates a considerable mass of sound - more the entire *basse-cour* than one solitary hen. Worth noting are the indications for registration - *fort* et *doux* - the only such occurrence in Rameau's keyboard works.

The two *menuets* are highly characterized. The first, in G major, is pastoral and playful, making clever use of hemiolas and suspensions. This piece appears in the 1754 version of *Castor et Pollux*, first as an instrumental piece, then sung. In the second *menuet*, in minor, Rameau gently leads the harmonies to some unfamiliar territory. *Les Triolets* is one of the most lyrical of *Rameau*'s harpsichord pieces. Making use of closely spaced three-part harmony (as in *L'Entretien des Muses*), Rameau's genius as harmonist is rarely more in evidence, with his ingenious use of suspensions to create poignant dissonances.

In 1725, Rameau attended a performance given by two American Indians from Louisiana. *Les Sauvages* appears to be directly inspired by this event. For his opera-ballet, *Les Indes Galantes* (1735), Rameau greatly extended the piece, alternating instrumental writing with vocal soloists, then chorus.

In the preface to "Les Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin", Rameau devotes a full paragraph defending the surprising ("*piquants*") harmonic effects to be found in *L'Enharmonique*. Although Rameau was greatly admired, he also had powerful detractors, who found his music to be

altogether too complicated and intellectual. If today's listener is unlikely to be shocked by these harmonies, we may still find them surprising and thrilling. Rameau's expertise in pushing the boundaries of harmonic rules (rather than breaking them) leads to what is certainly one of the most surprising moments to be found in 18th century keyboard music: in the middle of the second half of the piece, a series of diminished chords, with prepared suspensions leads finally to a fermata on a diminished chord. Apart from these novelties, *L'Enharmonique* is marvelously expressive and inventive.

The brilliant L'Egyptienne (The Gypsy Girl) brings the suite to a lively close with its virtuosic descending broken arpeggi in both hands and brilliant ornaments.

In 1741, Rameau published a set of five trios, "Pièces de clavecin en concert", setting the harpsichord as soloist, accompanied by violin and viola da gamba. Although serious solo literature for the harpsichord had existed for some two centuries at this date, in ensembles, the harpsichord was mostly used as a continuo instrument, with very few works existing for a written-out (or concertate) harpsichord. Johann Sebastian Bach composed his seven concerti for harpsichord and strings in the 1730's and his son Wilhelm Friedmann also produced such works during the same period. However, Rameau likely took his inspiration more from Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville's "Pièces de clavecin en sonates, Op.3" (1734), for solo harpsichord with an obbligato violin accompaniment. Rameau creates a new. dense texture with this combination of instruments. In the preface to the work, he states (perhaps not altogether sincerely?) that all of these pieces may also be performed by the harpsichord alone. He then provides a few brief suggestions for a certain number of pieces. He goes on, however, to explain that he himself has provided transcriptions of five pieces (Rameau is counting La Timide as two



*"Monsieur Rameau"*, painting by Louis Carrogis Carmontelle, ca. 1760

distinct pieces, apparently!), as he felt that these presented special problems. For the purposes of this recording, I am including only the original transcriptions.

La Livri is named for Rameau's friend and benefactor, the Count Louis Sanguin de Livri, who died just prior to this publication. It is an elegant *tombeau* - an elegy. We can recognize the beginning motif of the *gavotte* from the 1706 suite. Rameau re-orchestrated *La Livri* as *gavotte* en rondeau for *Zoroastre*. *L'agaçante* is cheerful and enticing (in modern French, *agacer* is generally held to mean "to annoy." However, in the 18th century, the meaning was more commonly "to entice"). Rameau uses it as "L'Entrée d'Indiens et d'Indiennes" in *Zoroastre*. *La Timide* begins with a gracious rondeau, in a minor. The right hand's gently swaying melody is doubled a sixth lower by the left hand. The second rondeau, in A major is bright and optimistic. The second *couplet* includes some very intricate passage work, the harpsichord given the task of playing what was originally intended for three instruments. The a minor theme is heard once more at the end. *L'indiscrète* is a jovial little piece, whose simple theme is played by the two hands a third apart. Each *couplet* introduces a fanfare-like character, first in major, then in the relative minor.

"La Dauphine" would seem to be the last harpsichord piece written by Jean-Philippe Rameau, likely in 1747. Although there is no absolute proof to this effect, "La Dauphine" has been regarded as Rameau's own notation of an improvisation he performed in honour of the marriage of Marie-Josephe of Saxony to Louis de France (Louis XV's son). Written in an unknown hand on the manuscript sheet: "*cette Piece est la copie originale de la main même du fameux Rameau* (this piece is an original copy in the famed Rameau's own hand)". This is the only manuscript of an original harpsichord piece by Rameau that has survived. The lyrical and pompous opening quickly gives way to toccata figuration. The ending of the second part certainly does seem improvisatory and perhaps a bit rambling.

Less certain is the provenance of "Les petits marteaux". It appears, credited to Rameau in Claude Balbastre's (1724 - 1799) manuscript: "Recueil d'airs choisis de plusieurs opéras accomodés par le clavecin par M. Balbastre," ca. 1761. Certainly, this clever little *menuet en trio* features one of Rameau's favorite tricks - the *battéries* wherein one hand quickly repeats the note that the other has just played.

Balbastre greatly admired Rameau. Charles Burney, the English composer and musical diarist speaks of being invited to Balbastre's apartments in Paris, where he admired the beautiful Ruckers harpsichord. On the lid of this harpsichord was painted a scene inspired by Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*. Rameau himself was depicted playing the lute. This recording ends with Balbastre's exceptional transcription of the ouverture to Rameau's *acte de ballet* from 1748, *Pigmalion*.



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Jory Vinikour is recognized as one of the outstanding harpsichordists of his generation. A highly diversified career brings him to the world's most important festivals and concert halls as recital and concerto soloist, partner to several of today's finest singers, and as one of the most visible continuo performers. Born in Chicago, Jory Vinikour came to Paris on a scholarship from the Fulbright

Foundation to study with Huguette Dreyfus and Kenneth Gilbert. First Prizes in the International Harpsichord Competitions of Warsaw (1993) and the Prague Spring Festival (1994) brought him to the public's attention, and he has since appeared in festivals and concert series throughout much of the world.

A concerto soloist with a repertoire ranging from Bach to Nyman, he has performed as soloist with leading orchestras including Rotterdam Philharmonic, Flanders Opera Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Lausanne Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonic of Radio France, Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Cape Town Symphony Orchestra, and Moscow Chamber Orchestra with conductors such as Stéphane Denève, Marek Janowski, Armin Jordan, Benjamin Levy, Fabio Luisi, Marc Minkowski, John Nelson, Gordan Nikolic, Constantine Orbelian, and Victor Yampolsky. He participated in a recording of Frank Martin's Petite Symphonie Concertante with the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Armin Jordan (Suisse Romande, 2005), and also performed the Harpsichord Concerto by the same composer with the Symphony Orchestra of the MDR in Leipzig's Gewandhaus under the direction of Martin Haselböck in January of 2003.

Well-known as an accompanist, he has appeared extensively in recital with artists such as David Daniels (European tour in 2007), Hélène Delavault, Magdalena Kozena, Annick Massis, et al. He has accompanied legendary Swedish mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter in recitals in Sweden, Norway, Spain and Paris and at La Scala in Milan.

Jory Vinikour has recently appeared as conductor with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, directing Bach's *Brandenburg Concerti* from the harpsichord. He has also appeared as guest director with the Korea Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Musica Angelica, and Juilliard415.





### DSL-92154 — The Complete Harpsichord Works of Rameau — Jory Vinikour

Recorded at Sono Luminus, November 29-December 2, 2011

Producer: Dan Merceruio Recording Engineer: Daniel Shores Editing Engineer: Dan Merceruio Mixing Engineer: Daniel Shores Mastering Engineer: Daniel Shores

#### Harpsichord Technician: Barbara Wolf

Harpsichord: Double-manual French harpsichord by Thomas and Barbara Wolf, 2005, The Plains, Virginia, after Nicolas Dumont, 1707, Paris: FF – f" (a=392/415/440), 2 x 8', 1 x 4', coupler, buff. Tuned in a 7th-comma homogenous French temperament at a=392.

Program Notes: Jory Vinikour Photography: Strider Jordan Graphic Design: Brandon Bloodworth

#### About the Harpsichord:

Dumont was an important Parisian maker, but little is known about him other than that he flourished from c. 1675 until at least 1707; the French court owned several of his instruments. Of the three that survive, 1707 and another from 1704 are among the earliest examples to have the 5-octave keyboard range and case design that became standard in the 18th century. (The original harpsichord's range is FF-e'''; the top f''' is added to accommodate a more complete range of literature.) The 1707 harpsichord resided in the same chateau for the better part of 300 years, surviving the revolution hidden in the estate's granary. Rediscovered and restored for the first time in the 1970s, the instrument is now in a private collection in Delaware.

The Dumont model is versatile: its scaling and plucking points reflect earlier traditions, making it articulate enough for contrapuntal music and continuo use, while its sonority and strong color contrasts between the manuals are useful in solo literature. The Wolf harpsichord was commissioned for the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland's School of Music (College Park), which generously made it available for this recording.



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