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CLASSICS

**Jean-Philippe Rameau**  
**PIECES FOR KEYBOARD**

*Premier Livre de Pièces de Clavecin*  
*Pièces de Clavecin avec une méthode*  
*sur la mécanique des doigts*

**Jill Crossland Piano**

# JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU

## PIECES FOR KEYBOARD

### Premier Livre de Pièces de Clavecin (1705/6)

1	Prélude	[2.52]
2	Alemande	[4.08]
3	2.e Alemande	[2.00]
4	Courante	[1.41]
5	Sarabandes	[2.36]
6	Gigue	[2.23]
7	Vénitienne	[1.31]
8	Gavote	[1.19]
9	Menuet	[1.19]

### Pièces de Clavecin avec une méthode sur la mécanique des Doigts (1724)

#### *'Suite' in E*

10	Allemande	[4.04]
11	Courante	[1.31]
12	Gigue en Rondeau	[1.35]
13	2.e Gigue en Rondeau	[1.58]
14	Le Rappel des Oiseaux (The Assembly of the Birds)	[2.55]
15	1.r Rigaudon – 2.d Rigaudon – double du 2.d Rigaudon	[2.25]

16	Musette en Rondeau	[2.10]
17	Tambourin	[1.20]
18	La Vilageoise (Rondeau)	[3.41]

#### *'Suite' in D*

19	Les Tendres Plaintes (The Tender Complaints)	[3.16]
20	Les Niais de Sologne (The Simpletons of Sologne)	[2.06]
21	1.er Double des Niais	[1.48]
22	2.d Double des Niais	[2.31]
23	Les Soupirs (The Sighs)	[4.43]
24	La Joyeuse (The Joyful Girl)	[1.07]
25	La Follette (The Mad Girl)	[1.24]
26	L'entretien Des Muses (The Muses' Conversation)	[5.18]
27	Le Lardon (The Gammon)	[0.54]
28	Les Tourbillons (The Whirlwinds)	[2.13]
29	La Boiteuse (The Limping Girl)	[0.59]
30	Les Cyclopes (The Cyclops)	[3.09]

Total timings [70.58]

JILL CROSSLAND PIANO

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## A NOTE FROM JILL CROSSLAND

Rameau's keyboard music is famous for refinement and virtuosity, for a distinctive juxtaposition of delicacy and drama. In addition, however, these are pieces that for me continually show humour, imagination, wit and originality; they have both depth and innocence.

I was first introduced to this music as a child of about eight. My local teacher, who encouraged me to discover a wide variety of repertoire, one day gave me a book of music by a composer of whom I had not heard – it was Rameau. I treasured this compilation of the well-known character pieces, which also had charming pictures of the composer himself and of harpsichords. I was fascinated by the wigs and period costumes, and thought of it as a story book, in which the musical scores were the narrative and those pictures the illustrations.

Some years on, my father, who had always had a huge influence on my choice of repertoire, and whose tastes I shared, discovered the keyboard music from a harpsichord CD set. The force of his conviction that this was great music and would sound well on the piano persuaded me to try it.

I love Rameau's ability to characterise, to construct a miniature world in a few instants. These pieces encompass an extraordinary range of moods and settings. Their singing melodic lines, exemplified above all by *La Villageoise* for me, but also by *Les Soupirs* and *L'entretien Des Muses* and many others, make them seem naturally pianistic for me. They are virtuosic too – as exemplified by the opening Prelude and the concluding Cyclopes. I have come to feel great affection for these pieces, and indeed to regard them as great music.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jill Crossland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, decorative flourish at the end of the name.

## RAMEAU: MAN AND STYLE

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764), regarded as the greatest French composer before the 19th century, overlapping his great contemporaries Bach, Handel and Scarlatti, is celebrated for both musical and academic achievements. His life is famously obscure, its details derived from those who knew him only after patronage in the 1730s had secured him the chance to write opera: it is therefore uncertain how true was his reputation as a severe, grumpy eccentric. His single-minded dedication to music was unquestioned – his friend Alexis Piron said of him: "His heart and soul were in his harpsichord; once he had shut its lid, there was no one home."

Rameau's music and playing are described as opposite from the austerities of his character, in having refinement, delicacy and intensity of feeling. Debussy was to refer to the composer's music as the musical equivalent of Antoine Watteau, whose dreamy *Fêtes Galantes* epitomise the French 18th century for the modern viewer. The comparison with visual artists is apt – Rameau's music is also characterised by the precise filigree of a Chardin portrait and with the connection to everyday life of a Greuze genre scene. Commentators have always agreed

that Rameau's music is notable for its poetic and emotional qualities. Rameau himself claimed to use 'art to conceal art': music itself was a natural form of expression; learning simply enabled composers to better communicate and give aural form to feelings and sensibility. This made him a 'modern' in the debates of his time.

Rameau's music is of course typically French in its decorative, ornamented style and in its many dance movements; it is also distinctive in pursuing the composer's interests in harmony, in sensibility (the use of the sound-world to convey feeling) and even virtuosity. Rameau does not appear to have met any of his great contemporaries, not even François Couperin, 15 years older and already at court when Rameau arrived in Paris. It is, however, argued there is Handelian influence in Rameau's continued interest in the suite form (and the resemblance between the famous Gavotte and 5 doubles and Handel's equivalent movement in Suite 3) as well as the obvious influence of Couperin in encouraging Rameau to write character and descriptive pieces. The first collection shows the influence of Louis Marchand, Rameau's friend and predecessor as organist at a Jesuit college in Paris, the second that of Jean Castel, a friend credited with

introducing Rameau to the idea of using birdsong in music. Rameau endlessly recycled his own music – *Le Rappel des Oiseaux*, *Musette* and *Tambourin* all found their way into *Les fêtes d'Hébé*, for example, but never borrowed from other composers and although he worked extensively as a church organist, he hardly composed any choral and organ music.

## KEYBOARD WORKS

The two collections on this disc, from 1705/6 and 1724, coincide with Rameau's two relocations to Paris – perhaps the first was intended as a calling card, the second, accompanied as it was by a four-page “introduction to finger technique” and a table of ornaments, to exploit his new name as a music theorist. A full textbook on learning the harpsichord was promised but never written, presumably because opera then took the composer's time. It is clear from each collection that Rameau was interested in exploring motivic connections between different movements. Rameau does not explicitly refer to the sets of pieces as suites, though the following collection was entitled ‘New Suites,’ but clearly the pieces on this CD do form three distinct groups.

The first collection famously contains one of the last pieces to be written without barlines, the Prelude, whose dramatic, improvisatory beginning resolves into rapid virtuosic figurations. The remainder of the collection consists of the standard movements of a French keyboard suite, with the exception of the *Vénitienne*, variously described as a Venetian dance or portrait.

By the time of the second collection, the technical demands in the music have become substantially more difficult. Rameau himself, in the four-page technical introduction, alludes to ‘batteries’ – such as fast notes alternating between the hands, and hand-crossing – and also to the virtuosic scale passages such as are found in *Les Tourbillons* and *Les Cyclopes*. Most of the pieces are now titled, although, as with his pictorial analogue, Watteau, the precise significance of the titles can be mysterious.

The closeness to birdsong in *Le Rappel des Oiseaux* is unmistakable, nor are the *Musette* (a type of bagpipes used at court) and *Tambourin* ambiguous, but it is moot as to whether or not *La Villageoise* refers to a city dweller (on the town and country mouse analogy). In the second part of the collection, the ‘suite’ in D, *Les*

*Niais de Sologne* refers to a region famous for its ‘Niais’ or simpletons, but why – as a reference to its repeated, meandering melody? *La Boiteuse* has a limping rhythm, *Les Tourbillons* plausibly refers to the whirling dustclouds on a windy day, or to a rotating mechanism. *La Joyeuse* and *La Follette* are equally possibly representations of joy and of whimsy, but *Le Lardon* (representing the pricking of spices into a joint of ham?) and *Les Cyclopes* are less obvious, and *Les Tendres Plaintes*, *L'entretien des Muses* and *Les Soupirs* are clearly abstract in some degree.

After the 1724 works, Rameau further developed his keyboard work in the collection variously attributed to any year between 1726 and 1730 and in the *Pièces de Clavecin en Concerts*; otherwise, only the transcriptions of *Les Indes Galantes* and a few individual pieces were written between his operas.

## RAMEAU PRINTED

The complete first publication of the keyboard music was edited by Saint-Saëns in 1895, as part of a complete edition of the composer's works. Saint-Saëns of course took liberties that would be anathema to modern scholarship,

omitting ornaments (and repeats) that seemed unpianistic, making the text as palatable as possible to the 19th-century pianist and allowing a number of wrong notes to be printed. The first modern edition, in 1958, was by Erwin Jacobi, a pupil of Wanda Landowska (and only recently superseded, in 2004, by Rampe's edition for the same publishers, Baerenreiter), by the time of the second, by Kenneth Gilbert, the ‘authenticity’ movement was in full swing. The idiosyncrasies of 18th-century orthography are now standard in modern renderings – hence the inconsistencies with which both the collections and the individual movements are titled.

As Rameau himself was to remark, the keyboard works were physically printed according to the convenience of printing – in terms of printer's layout and the wish to avoid page turns. So the order of the movements differs from that expected in the case where the works are performed as complete ‘suites’. In particular, *Le Lardon* and *La Boiteuse* are interpolated towards the end of the ‘suite in D’ and the sarabandes precede the gigue in the ‘first suite.’ The tranquil profundity of *La Villageoise*, however, means a number of performers (as here) choose to end the second ‘suite’ with it rather than with the obviously tub-thumping *Tambourin*.

## RAMEAU ON THE PIANO AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

For pianists such as Cziffra, Cherkassky and Gilels, individual pieces by Rameau, such as the *Tambourin* or the “Gavotte and five doubles” were common in recital programmes, but the only complete recording using the piano was by Marcelle Meyer, a pupil of Marguerite Long, in the late 1940s, and with distinguished rare exceptions, such as Grigory Sokolov, Rameau is currently heard relatively rarely on the piano.

French harpsichord music uses ornamentation and the rhythmical variation of *notes inégales* as principal methods of conveying emotional tension and depth. Playing Rameau on the piano, as well as gesturing towards their distinguished performance history on recital platforms, also entails making the most of the piano’s own sound world and expressive possibilities.

It would be perverse to play these pieces as if the piano were a harpsichord – in his essays for example, no less impeccable a scholarly authority as Paul Badura-Skoda comments that the plucked action of the harpsichord gives a resonance analogous to a minimal amount

of pedal on the piano – so that absolutely eschewing the use of the pedal misses the point. Likewise, though correctness in ornamentation is very important, Badura-Skoda emphasises the need for freedom and variation, not a pedantic realisation of what is written: *“Although the application of an ornament must be regulated by compositional convention, it also requires a certain freedom. If a tyrant ordered all women to wear the same jewellery it would no longer be jewellery but a uniform.”* This even applies to *notes inégales*. A pianist who were to mimic the precise harpsichord treatment of *notes inégales* would risk turning an expressive device for the earlier instrument into a stammering, anti-lyrical effect on the piano.

Although Rameau’s operatic and theatrical interests clearly influence the keyboard works, they need no apology or special pleading, nor to piggy-back on the fame of those larger dramatic works. Irrespective of the instrument that presents them, they display both the perfection of miniatures and the profundity of an exquisite sensibility.

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## JILL CROSSLAND

Jill Crossland studied at Chethams School of Music and the Royal Northern College of Music with Ryszard Bakst, and in Vienna with Paul Badura-Skoda and Sally Sargent. She performed the complete *Well-tempered Clavier* from memory as a student in Manchester and has always been closely associated with the work.

Jill pursues an active concert and recording career in the UK and abroad, including regular appearances at the Wigmore Hall and South Bank in London. She is particularly known for her performances of 18th-century music. Jill has also played at Bridgewater Hall, Fairfield and Blackheath Halls, St George’s Bristol, the Sage Gateshead, National Concert Hall Dublin, Vienna Musikverein, Vienna Konzerthaus and Leipzig Gewandhaus and numerous performances for festivals and other venues.

Jill has been a member of the Musicians in Residence scheme, supported by funding from Arts Council England. She also participates in audience development projects in her native Yorkshire and the surrounding region.



Bach's complete *Well-tempered Clavier* is also available on Signum; it has been described as 'polished and compelling' by *International Record Review*, and as 'mesmerizing' by *Fanfare* magazine. Jill has made other recordings of works by Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, Rameau, Mozart and Beethoven, including Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Among many critical plaudits: 'She well deserves her enviable reputation as a Bach pianist.' (*BBC Music Magazine*) and has been called 'a highly individual [Bach] player' and a 'natural Mozartean' (*Penguin Guide to CDs*), her playing described as having 'intensity and real pathos' (*International Record Review*), and her Beethoven as 'delightful' and 'magnetic' by turns (*American Record Guide*).

Jill has appeared on radio and television, including performing on BBC Radio 3 and 4 and on RTE's *Late Late Show*. She has also recorded a number of film and TV soundtracks, including work for the BFI and ITV. Jill's recordings have also featured in the Classic FM Hall of Fame.

Recorded at St Paul's Church, Deptford, London from 11-13 August 2010.

Producer - Ying Chang  
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Photo of Jill Crosland - Suzie Maeder  
Cover Image - Shutterstock

Design and Artwork - Woven Design [www.wovendesign.co.uk](http://www.wovendesign.co.uk)

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