

Jean-Philippe
Rameau



Pièces de Clavecin
Volume 1

Steven Devine
harpsichord

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

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Steven Devine *harpsichord*

Performed on a copy by Ian Tucker of a double-manual harpsichord
by Andreas Ruckers of Antwerp (1636) with *ravalement* by
Henri Hemsch of Paris (1763)

About Steven Devine

'[...] he [Devine] exercises restraint, but his muscular style is remarkably expressive.'
The Independent

*'[...] this account by Steven Devine [...] is scrupulous [...] his playing is adroit
and his attention to every detail of the ornamentation punctilious'*
The Guardian

Premier Livre de Pièces de Clavecin (1706)

Suite in A minor

1. Prélude	[2:21]
2. Allemande I	[5:28]
3. Allemande II	[2:09]
4. Courante	[2:01]
5. Gigue	[2:46]
6. Sarabande I & II	[3:24]
7. Vénitienne	[1:54]
8. Gavotte	[1:36]
9. Menuet	[1:27]

Pièces de Clavessin (1724)

Suite in E minor

10. Allemande	[4:15]
11. Courante	[1:34]
12. Gigue en rondeau I	[1:13]
13. Gigue en rondeau II	[2:11]
14. Le Rappel des Oiseaux	[3:39]
15. Rigaudon I & II (with double)	[1:51]
16. Musette en rondeau	[2:29]
17. Tambourin	[1:18]
18. La Villageoise (Rondeau)	[3:34]

Suite in D minor/major

19. Les Tendres Plaintes (Rondeau)	[3:45]
20. Les Niais de Sologne (with 2 doubles)	[6:16]
21. Les Soupirs	[5:20]
22. La Joyeuse (Rondeau)	[1:23]
23. La Follette (Rondeau)	[1:33]
24. L'Entretien des Muses	[6:13]
25. Les Tourbillons (Rondeau)	[2:59]
26. Les Cyclopes (Rondeau)	[3:47]
27. Le Lardon	[0:55]
28. La Boiteuse	[0:52]
29. Menuet en rondeau	[1:01]

Total playing time [79:27]



Steven Devine

Jean-Phillipe Rameau: Pièces de Clavecin Volume 1

At the time of the publication of the first collection of harpsichord pieces (also his earliest known compositions), Jean-Phillipe Rameau (1683-1764) was in Paris and had just succeeded Louis Marchand as organist at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. Marchand's first two books of harpsichord works were published in 1702, four years earlier than Rameau's. The similarities are striking: an improvisatory prelude begins both Marchand's and Rameau's Suites and the remaining dance movements follow not only a common pattern but share many textural and harmonic similarities as well. Rameau's suite opens with a *prelude non-mesuré* which quickly gives way to a firm rhythmic 12/8 movement. The two Allemandes are differentiated by their notation, the first with four beats to the bar, the second in the rarer two. The remaining movements are rather more 'standard' but already Rameau's melodic gift shows through – some 30 years before he applied himself to the vocal genre in earnestness. This collection was re-published in 1741, presumably to satisfy the demand for works from the increasingly-famous composer. Much of this music must have then seemed

old-fashioned: for example, unmeasured preludes feature very little in musical literature after this collection.

In 1722, Rameau published his *Traité de l'harmonie*; a work which proved divisive amongst musicians, theorists and intellectuals. It gained Rameau many friends and brought his theories to a wider audience. One critic, Louis-Bertrand Castel, wrote extremely enthusiastically of this work at the time – and may have been partly responsible for the work's large dissemination. However, Castel's feelings towards Rameau cooled over the next ten years and, around 1735, he wrote that Rameau had failed to acknowledge the help that others had given him in his compositional researches. One such example of this was Castel's claim to have introduced Rameau to transcriptions of birdsong – which form the basis of a number of Rameau's harpsichord works. The collections of 1724 – two suites of much greater proportions than the 1706 set – mark an interesting midway point between the 'classic' French Suite of dances and the increasingly programmatic collections appearing from François Couperin (Couperin's first three books of *ordres* had appeared between the Rameau's first two harpsichord publications). Thus, in the

E minor pieces, we see 'classic' dance movements at the opening (Allemande, Courante, Gigue) followed by *Le rappel des Oiseaux* – the first 'birdsong' piece, although the wistful texture and harmony suggest a melancholy recollection rather than direct imitation. Characterful dance pieces follow with more wistful harmonies in the *Musette en Rondeau* and *La Villageoise* and strong, textural writing in the *Tamborin*.

By the time the collection moves to the key-centre of D the music entirely comprises programmatic or character pieces. Some commentators have suggested that Rameau was less interested in exploring innovative harpsichord sonorities yet there is a huge range of variety throughout this volume and Rameau does not hesitate to explore the extremes of the keyboard compass for dramatic effect. Of the slower music *Les Tendres Plaintes* and *Les Soupirs* are much more direct in their emotion than the slower E minor pieces. The latter is also outstanding for the very precise notation with regard to ornamentation – slurs combined with the ornament Rameau calls *cadence* give a distinct delayed feel to the beat. Rameau very helpfully supplies a table of ornaments at the

head of the collection – along with a charming *Menuet en Rondeau* (track 29), which is also intended as a guide to fingering.

In *Les Niais de Sologne* (Fools or Simpletons of Sologne – Sologne being a swamp region South of Paris) the composer utilises the Renaissance concept of dividing the figuration in successive iterations and creates a show-piece for the left hand in the second of its two variations. The preceding variation is a rare example of written triplets against written duplets; the marking 'notes égales' at the top of the whole piece may offer a clue as to execution: the prevailing aesthetic of the time was to play this figuration of music with gently 'swung' quavers or semiquavers (depending on the context), somewhat in the manner of modern jazz players. According to this style, if quavers and semiquavers were written simultaneously, the quavers would be altered to synchronise with the triplets (effectively made 'long – short'). Rameau's instruction at the top of this piece could have been an indication to players who would have expected to synchronise this variation to play it literally with even quavers. This is the solution I have adopted for this recording.

After *La Joyeuse* and *La Follette*, two charming





Double-manual harpsichord by Ian Tucker of an instrument by Andreas Ruckers of Antwerp (1636) with *ravalement* by Henri Hemsch of Paris (1763)

pieces in *Rondeau* form, comes *L'entretien Des Muses* (The Muses' entreaties): a wonderful, pathos-filled movement which makes particular use of a 'delaying' ornament Rameau describes as *suspension* which imparts a hesitant feel to repetitious long notes.

The whirlwind figuration of *Les Tourbillons* is given a charming description by Rameau as depicting swirls of dust being agitated by strong winds – a picture that takes on slightly alarming proportions in the second reprise as the wind appears to become even stronger! This piece is followed by *Les Cyclopes*, possibly inspired by the one-eyed monster featuring in a 1722 Paris revival of Lully's *Persée*. Two small pieces complete the collection; it is possible they were designed for a different position in the sequence of pieces, but here they are given in the printed order.

Les Tourbillons and *Les Cyclopes* contain virtuoso technical demands which are highlighted in the enlightening preface. Rameau describes the specific figurations as *Roulement* and *Batterie* .

Lorsqu'on passé avec vitesse les notes de la Leçon, cle as'appelle Roulement, & si les notes de cette

Leçon étoient disjointes, cela s' appelleroit Batterie... il y a deux [] sortes de batteries, don't ou trouvera l'exemple dans la piece intitulée *Les Cyclopes*: dans l'une de ces batteries, les mains font entr'elles le mouvement consecutive des deux baguettes d'un tambour; & dans l'autre, la main gauche passé pardessus la droite, pour toucher alternativement la Basse & le Dessus. Je crois que ces [] batteries me son particulaires, du moins il n'en a point encore paru de la sorte; & je puis dire en leur faveur que l'œil y partage le plaisir qu'en reçoit l'oreille

[When one passes quickly over the notes of the lesson, this is called a *Roulement* and if the notes of this lesson were disjointed that would be called a *Batterie*... There are two [] sorts of batteries, examples of which may be found in the piece entitled *Les Cyclopes*: in one the hands between them make the consecutive movement of two drumsticks, whilst in the other the left hand passes over the right to play alternatively the bass and treble. I believe that these [] batteris never appeared before; and I might add in their favour that not only the ear but also the eye derives pleasure from them.]

Of particular interest in the preface is Rameau's description of a basic approach to play the harpsichord:

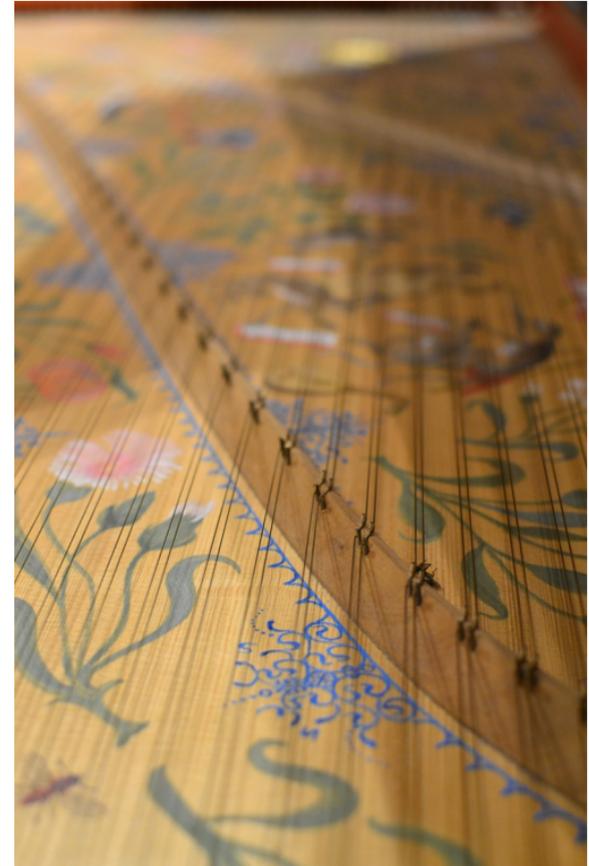
Du doigt par lequel on a commence, on passé à son voisin, & ainsi de l'un à l'autre; en observant que celui qui vient d'enforcer une touché, la quitte dans la meme instant que son voisin en enfonce une autre: car le lever d'une doigt & le toucher d'un autre doivent être executés dans la meme moment.

[From the finger that you start, pass to its neighbour and so on from one to the other; take care that the finger which has just pressed a key leaves it in the same instance that its neighbour presses another: for the lifting of one finger and the pressing of another must happen at the same moment (Simultaneously).]

This is different to teaching elsewhere in Europe (and even in France) where many theorists and composers were advocating a slight articulation – Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (1718 – 1795) summarised it a number of years later as *ordentliches Fortgehen* ['basic procedure'] – between notes if they were not marked with a legato or staccato mark. That Rameau (and Couperin in *L'art de toucher le clavecin*) was requesting a more legato approach to harpsichord playing is very significant to the performance of this music, particularly when applied to the appropriate instrument.

For this recording, the instrument chosen was a copy, by Ian Tucker, of a double-manual harpsichord originally made by Andreas Ruckers of Antwerp in 1636. These instruments were highly prized for their tone and workmanship and frequently they were 'updated' by later makers to increase the compass and sometimes the dynamic possibilities. This process was known as *ravelement* and in this particular instrument was undertaken in Paris by Henri Hemsch, in 1763. The temperament was *temperament ordinaire* and the instrument was tuned and maintained by Edmund Pickering.

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Steven Devine

Steven Devine enjoys a busy career as a music director and keyboard player working with some of the finest musicians.

He made his London conducting debut in 2002 at the Royal Albert Hall and is now a regular performer there - including making his BBC Proms directing debut in August 2007 with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE). He has conducted the Mozart Festival Orchestra in every major concert hall in the UK and also across Switzerland. Steven is Music Director for New Chamber Opera in Oxford and with them has conducted performances of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Mozart's *La Finta Semplice* and *Il Re Pastore*, Stradella's *Il Trespolo Tutore*, Rossini's *Le Comte Ory*, Handel's *Xerxes and Tamerlano*, Arne's *Artaxerxes*, Galuppi's *Il Mondo alla Rovessa*. He has directed the first performance of the newly-acquired score of Cavalli's *Erismena* and Sallieri's *Falstaff* with the same forces. For the Dartington Festival Opera he has conducted Handel's *Orlando* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*.

Since 2007 Steven has been the harpsichordist with London Baroque in addition to his position as Co-Principal keyboard player with the Orchestra of the

Age of Enlightenment. He is also the principal keyboard player for The Gonzaga Band, Apollo and Pan, The Classical Opera Company and performs regularly with many other groups around Europe. He has recorded over thirty discs with other artists and ensembles and made three solo recordings. His recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations (Chandos Records) has been receiving critical acclaim - including Gramophone magazine describing it as 'among the best'.

Steven is a regular member of the OAE education team, Professor of Harpsichord and Fortepiano at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and a visiting teacher, adjudicator and examiner for many other institutions. He is also Director of Development for the Finchcocks Collection of historical keyboard instruments, Kent.

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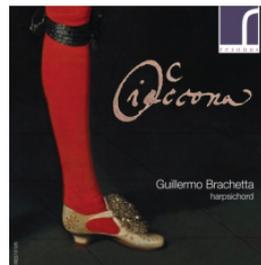
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