

Sleeve note information for CD of music by Moyreau played by Douglas Hollick.

CHRISTOPHE MOYREAU – A PERFORMERS VIEW OF THE MUSIC

I first became aware of the music of Moyreau in 1973 when I purchased an LP recording by André Isoir whilst studying in Paris with Marie-Claire Alain. Included on this was the organ piece *Les Cloches d'Orléans*, and the strange almost hypnotic character of the music fascinated me. It was not until the end of the 1980s that I was able to get any of his music, and from then there were facsimile editions available. I gradually acquired all six volumes of the *Pièces de Clavecin*, originally published in Paris in 1753 under the patronage of the Duc d'Orléans. It quickly became apparent that here was some of the most extraordinary music of the mid 18th century, and as I started to perform some in concerts it also became clear that people loved his unfamiliar and fantastic style.

So what is it that is so different from other French harpsichord music of this period? In many respects it does not look very different, but there are a number of things which set this music apart. One is the attraction for Moyreau of writing on a single stave, often with repeated note figurations and the hands interlocked one above the other – certainly these figures are found in fairly simple form in Rameau, but here they are taken to the absolute extreme, as in the central section of *La Baccante*. In some cases (as in *La Mode* or the second part of *L'Etourdi*) the texture demands the use of two manuals, but mostly the musical texture demands one integrated sound played on one manual. Another regular feature of this music is the harmonic audacity with which Moyreau astonishes. *La Baccante* is perhaps the most strange, presumably to illustrate the drunken orgy of mythology, but one also finds many other examples: the downward arpeggio near the beginning of *L'Orphée* which changes from major to minor in full flight; the use of the Neapolitan and augmented sixths in *La Bourruë*; a weird approach to the final cadence in *La Mode*; many strange things in *Le Pandoure*, but particularly the strong repeated chords in the first *Couplet*; the chromaticism in *Le Purgatoire*, and the final cadence of *Les Cloches d'Orléans*. Allied with this harmonic audacity is a wide ranging use of distant tonalities. This might suggest that he was interested in Rameau's ideas for the use of equal temperament, but my own feeling is that the music gains rather than loses from the use of an unequal temperament which colours and points up the modulations.

The two organ pieces are found in amongst the harpsichord works – *Les Cloches d'Orléans* is headed 'Pièce pour l'Orgue et le Clavecin', but has very clear registration instructions for the reed based *Grand Jeu*, together with details of the manual changes. *Le Purgatoire* concludes with the comment 'Cette Pièce se peut toucher sur l'Orgue', but has no indication of registration; I have used the *Fond d'Orgue* here as this seems best to convey the rather sombre nature of the music. Individual sections of the piece have titles such as 'Plaintes des Morts', 'Cris Lamentables', 'Redoublemens de Cris', 'Souffrances aigue' and 'Sommeil Eternel'! Both pieces have textures which are impossible to play without pedals – on the harpsichord one would need a second player perhaps.

Almost nothing is known of Moyreau, so one is left wondering where his inspiration came from. Whatever view one takes, it is clear that he was a player possessed of a very strong technique, but one which was quite idiosyncratic. I have found from playing lots of his music that there are certain elements of technique which once learnt (as in *La Baccante*) then transfer seamlessly to other pieces in Moyreau's output, but are rarely much help in music of other composers. Another feature very apparent to the player, but not to the listener, is the extent to which he takes trouble over precisely notating textures, and this attention to detail has convinced me that like François Couperin, he probably would not have wanted much if any additional ornamentation. I have picked for this recording the pieces which I feel give the best overview of his music, from the Rameau inspired *Ouverture* of the first book to

the Italianate *Sinfonia II* of the sixth and last book, and I hope that at last this almost totally neglected figure of the French Baroque will gain a wider audience.

The instruments used on this recording

The two organ pieces were recorded on December 10th 2001 on the Metzler organ in the Chapel of Trinity College Cambridge, an instrument of 3 manuals and pedal with 42 stops built in 1976. It is tuned in a mild unequal temperament at A=440. The recording was made by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, and the Director of Music Dr Richard Marlow.

The harpsichord used was made by Douglas Hollick in 1989, and is a copy of a two manual instrument of 1711 by the Lyons maker Pierre Donzelague. It has the usual 18th century French disposition of 8, 8 and 4, with a buff stop to the upper 8, and a shove coupler. For this recording it was tuned at A=409, one of the known 18th century French harpsichord pitches, and one which suits this instrument admirably. The temperament is one by Douglas Hollick based on his extensive knowledge of the tunings of the period. The recording was made on December 14th 2001 in the Gold Room at Harlaxton Manor, Lincolnshire, by kind permission of The University of Evansville, owners of the Manor.

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Moyreau note by Graham Sadler, Reader and Head of Department of Music, Hull University.

By the middle of the eighteenth century French harpsichord building had reached a pinnacle of excellence. Then as now, instruments from the workshops of Blanchet, Taskin and Hemsch were prized not only for their extreme physical beauty but also for their tonal richness and refinement. Small wonder that the composer Balbastre, confronted with a fledgling pianoforte, uttered the confident if spectacularly inaccurate prediction: 'never will this newcomer eclipse the noble *clavecin!*'

What a paradox, then, that the period of French harpsichord music from the mid-1730s onwards has often been portrayed as one of decline. For the best part of a century France had given birth to a succession of outstanding keyboard composers, beginning with Chambonnières, Louis Couperin and D'Anglebert, and culminating with François Couperin and Rameau. But after the death of François Couperin in 1733, the fashion swung towards a rather flashy, facile style of composition and performance. As the organist Foucquet put it in 1751, 'people nowadays admire manual dexterity and seem less moved by a graceful, tender and warm-hearted execution', while Titon du Tillet (1743) was among the minority who still preferred music 'free of that affected harmony and those risky and brilliant passages that astonish the mind more than they touch and charm the heart'.

Yet to tar a whole generation of composers with the brush of showy mediocrity is unfair. Today, with the advantage of reliable editions, facsimile reprints and, above all, sympathetic and informed performances on appropriate instruments, a more balanced view is possible – one which recognises the wealth of invention by such composers as Royer, Duphy, Mondonville and Balbastre, uneven though their outputs may seem. The hitherto neglected music of Christophe Moyreau, inexplicably described as 'insipid' a century ago, is more than worthy to stand up in such company on account of its sheer panache, energy and finesse.

We know little of Moyreau's biography. He was descended from a distinguished Orléans family which, from the Middle Ages onwards, included several professional musicians as well as others in academic, parliamentary or artistic careers (the painter Jean Moyreau may have been his brother). In or around 1732 Christophe became organist at the cathedral of Sainte-Croix in Orléans, a post he retained until his death in 1772 or 74. He was presumably also a music teacher, since he published a *Petit Abrégé des principes de musique par demandes et réponses* (now lost), an instruction manual for beginners in question-and-answer mode.

This treatise apart, Moyreau's output is limited to six books of solo keyboard music. These are undated, but the composer was granted a publication privilege on 30 January 1753, and contemporary press notices confirm that all six volumes appeared during that year. Appropriately they are dedicated to the Duke of Orléans, who doubtless contributed towards the production costs and may well have assisted the provincial composer to have his works engraved by Mlle Vendôme, one of the finest engravers of the day. Even so, the chances are that these publications had a fairly limited circulation, given that only a single exemplar of each survives.

In the first five books Moyreau reveals an innovative approach in the design of the suite. Between them, these books contain six colossal suites, two in the first and thereafter one per book. Each suite comprises between 18 and 26 movements, opening with an overture and up to five of the traditional dance movements. These are followed by a larger selection of character pieces (those bearing a descriptive if often enigmatic title) of the sort that had dominated the French keyboard suite since the time of François Couperin. Then comes a second overture followed by a multi-movement sonata or concerto, or (in Book 5) both. By contrast, Book 6 consists solely of three-movement 'simphonies' in the Italian manner, a scheme unprecedented in the solo French repertory.

In the character titles of the first five books Moyreau reveals certain preferences. He shuns the fashion for naming pieces after individuals (as in Rameau's 'La Lapopliniere' and 'La Laborde', respectively patron and pupil). Instead he prefers titles that suggest a type of person, with a tendency towards the bizarre or grotesque – 'La petite Follette' (the mad-cap little girl), 'L'Espion' (the spy), 'La Bourruë' (grumpy or irritable), 'L'Insensé' (the insane), 'L'Etourdi' (the scatterbrained). Other pieces allude to Classical mythology – 'La Baccante', 'L'Euridice', 'L'Orphée' (these forming a suite-within-a-suite in the Couperin tradition), 'Le Momus', 'Le Pandoure' (Pandora). Exoticism is represented here by 'L'azem-Beba Carmagniole' (who he?) and elsewhere by 'L'Iroquois', 'La Japonoise' and others. Interestingly Moyreau draws attention several times to his home town, in 'L'Orléanois', 'Les cloches d'Orléans' and 'La Loire'; not all of these have been recorded here.

Indeed, the fact that Moyreau spent his life mainly (wholly?) in the relative obscurity of provincial Orléans may well explain some characteristics of his musical language. True, he was clearly aware of the music of his predecessors, since printed editions were easily accessible. The most persistent influence is that of Rameau. For example, Moyreau makes a speciality of the kinds of virtuoso *batteries* that Rameau claims to have invented – in particular the rapid alternation of the hands on repeated notes or chords. Occasionally, in some of the more bizarre flights of fancy, one detects a hint of Domenico Scarlatti, whose *Essercizi* had been available in France since 1735. The sonatas and concertos adopt a more generalised Italianate idiom of a kind that was prevalent throughout Europe but slow to gain a foothold in France.

All such influences are nevertheless skilfully assimilated into a personal and idiosyncratic idiom. It is as if Moyreau's isolation at Orléans – like Haydn's at the Esterházy court – 'forced' him to be original. Such originality is most apparent in Moyreau's harmonic

experimentation – in particular in ‘Le Purgatoire’, with obvious illustrative intent – but is also on display in the delicacy and variety of his treatment of texture.

It is easy to over-emphasise the zanier aspects of Moyreau’s style. To be sure, the composer seems particularly drawn to the kind of ‘risky and brilliant passages’ that were not to Tilton du Tillet’s taste. Yet the composer’s output also includes such gems as ‘La Guépine’, a simple but haunting melody adorned with delicate decorative detail and spiced with unexpectedly rich harmonies – in short, as beautiful a piece as you could find in any French collection of the day.