

FRANÇOIS COUPERIN

Quatrième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin

GUILLERMO BRACHETTA harpsichord



resonus



François Couperin (1668–1733)

Quatrième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin

Guillermo Brachetta *harpichord*

Harpichord by Keith Hill (2010) after Pascal Taskin (1769)

About Guillermo Brachetta:

'[...] above all, it's Brachetta's playing – extrovert but never 'flashy' – that is the key. Instinctively idiomatic, he is compelling throughout'
BBC Music Magazine

DISC ONE

Vingtième Ordre

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. La Princesse Marie | [3:16] |
| 2. La Boufonne | [2:04] |
| 3. Les Chérubins ou L'aimable Lazure | [3:04] |
| 4. La Croûilli ou la Couperinète | [4:16] |
| 5. La Fine Madelon | [2:33] |
| 6. La douce Janneton | [2:25] |
| 7. La Sézile | [2:26] |
| 8. Les Tambourins | [1:36] |

Vingt-Unième Ordre

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| 9. La Reine des coeurs | [3:21] |
| 10. La Bondissante | [1:52] |
| 11. La Couperin | [4:28] |
| 12. La Harpée | [3:09] |
| 13. La Petite Pince-sans-rire | [1:54] |

Vingt-Deuxième Ordre

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| 14. Le Trophée | [4:00] |
| 15. Le point du jour | [2:38] |
| 16. L'Anguille | [3:17] |
| 17. Le Croc-en-jambe | [2:07] |
| 18. Menuets croisés | [2:15] |
| 19. Les Tours de Passe-passe | [3:19] |

Vingt-Troisième Ordre

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| 20. L'Audacieuse | [3:30] |
| 21. Les Tricoteuses | [2:13] |
| 22. L'Arlequine | [1:34] |
| 23. Les Gondoles de Délos | [6:24] |
| 24. Les Satires, Chevre-Pieds | [4:16] |

Vingt-Quatrième Ordre

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| 25. Les Vieux Seigneurs | [3:50] |
| 26. Les Jeunes Seigneurs | [3:54] |

Total playing time [79:56]

DISC TWO

Vingt-Quatrième Ordre (continued)

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1. Les Dars-homicides | [2:27] |
| 2. Les Guirlandes | [6:36] |
| 3. Les Brinborions | [4:14] |
| 4. La Divine-Babiche ou les amours badins | [4:30] |
| 5. La Belle Javotte | [1:08] |
| 6. L'Amphibie | [5:40] |

Vingt-Cinquième Ordre

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 7. La Visionnaire | [3:29] |
| 8. La Misterieuse | [4:25] |
| 9. La Monflambert | [2:03] |
| 10. La Muse Victorieuse | [2:46] |
| 11. Les Ombres Errantes | [3:38] |

Vingt-Sixième Ordre

- | | |
|----------------------|--------|
| 12. La Convalescente | [5:15] |
| 13. Gavote | [2:01] |
| 14. La Sophie | [3:37] |
| 15. L'Épineuse | [5:24] |
| 16. La Pantomime | [4:02] |

Vingt-Septième Ordre

- | | |
|-----------------|--------|
| 17. L'Exquise | [3:52] |
| 18. Les Pavots | [5:08] |
| 19. Les Chinois | [3:29] |
| 20. Saillie | [2:51] |

Total playing time [76:46]



A Self-Portrait

Grace, more beautiful than beauty
Jean de la Fontaine

François Couperin's harpsichord pieces are not merely depictions of people, situations and objects: they are, ultimately, reflections of the author himself, of how emotions impacted his heart and soul, while the whole turns into a portrait of him showing his tenderness, melancholy, humour, acuity, irony and sensuality. They are never vainly showy, they are never superficial. He composed with obsession for detail and yet his music never turns stiff or cerebral. There's never a rushed feeling, never a hint of compromise.

His music is extremely personal; it belongs closely to him but it also becomes part of us at some point, making us empathise with him and believe we've found in him a close friend to whom we can easily feel we are free to open our heart to talk about our pains and dreams.

François voiced it by saying in the preface to his first book of *Pieces de Clavecin*: 'I prefer that which moves me to that which surprises me'. He moves us too, listeners and players alike. Playing his music creates a sensual, almost seductive connection with the harpsichord. One has the sensation of

touching the keys the way we'd touch our lover, the way we'd caress them. We feel the instrument as if it were a living creature and as if it only needed our tender touch to bring it to sleep and dream.

He saddens us, makes us smile, reflect on past times and dream of future joys. His humanity is an almost palpable presence, his feelings become ours and his proximity turns into a reality through his dearly crafted miniatures, full of grace, shaped with the precision and care of a goldsmith.

This fourth and last book, written three years before his death and while in poor health, sounds as a farewell. He put it with resigned words in his preface: 'I hope that my family will discover in my portfolios something which may cause me to be regretted, if indeed regrets are of any use to us after life. One must, however, hold to such an idea, if one is to endeavour to merit that chimerical immortality to which nearly all men aspire'.

He wouldn't have ever imagined that his chimera would become real and that he, through his generously open privateness, would materialise almost as a real entity, as a living being, as a confidant and a friend.

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François Couperin: Quatrième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin

François Couperin has come down in history as a court composer of exquisitely refined harpsichord music. Only very recently has this view begun to change. Awareness of his many beautiful motets and his fine chamber music grows by the day. All directly approachable, listeners can go about their daily lives whistling the catchy tunes of the *Motet de Sainte Suzanne* or the 'Rondeau' from *L'Impériale*. The keyboard music is more problematic. Only a small number of the earlier pieces circulated in his lifetime. Even though the technical perfection and resulting beauty is obvious there is always an elusive quality which prompted Wanda Landowska to ask: 'Whence comes this strange language?' In order to find out we have to explore the world behind the often mysterious titles.

Apart from his organist's post of three months a year, awarded him in 1694, and his teaching of some members of the royal family, recent research has shown that he worked very little at Versailles. It has also shown that he worked at the exiled Stuart Court at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. He inherited the family post of organist at the church of Saint-Gervais in Paris and

he had many pupils in the city. He played with a group of colleagues for the King at the end of his life and wrote music for these concerts and he played with the same colleagues for the extended royal family. After the death of Louis XIV the Regent, Philippe d'Orléans, appointed him *Ordinaire de la Musique de la Chambre du Roi pour le Clavecin*, a post that included a pension. Apart from this relatively little has come down to us.

From the titles of his *Pièces de Clavecin* however we can learn a great deal. Couperin himself said in his preface to Book I that the pieces were ideas that had occurred to him and many of them were portraits which, under his fingers, had been found to be tolerable likenesses. He praised the work of his forbears, saying that their music still appealed to people of 'refined taste' ('ceux qui l'ont exquis') but that the 'new and diversified character' of his own pieces had assured them 'a favourable reception with the people who matter (le monde)'.

Edward Dannreuther, in the first edition of *Grove's Dictionary*, remarked on 'the theatrical twang noticeable in the quaint titles of many of the pieces'. Little did he know how perceptive this observation was. It is from the theatrical titles we

learn most about Couperin and his values. Titon du Tillet in *Le Parnasse François*, said Couperin's *Pièces de Clavecin* were 'd'un goût nouveau', in a new style. He said the same of the playwright Charles Dufresny. He said Dufresny understood music perfectly and his lively portraits of almost all the different characteristics of mankind were 'd'un goût nouveau'. Was he perhaps an influence?

Charles Dufresny contributed plays to *Le Théâtre italien*, a collection published by the great harlequin, Evaristo Gherardi. The precise references to scenes and speeches from these plays tell us that Couperin must have been close to this troupe. At first supported by Louis XIV the plays gradually became more and more subversive, particularly concerning the unpopular Mme de Maintenon. She was a lady of reforming zeal and she slowly turned the court into what one courtier called 'a monastery in court dress'. The courtiers and younger members of the royal family, Couperin's pupils, resented this. From 1688, for most of the rest of Louis XIV's reign, France was at war and conditions at home became appalling for many people so discontent and subversion rumbled on every side.

Couperin was clearly part of this subversive movement but, like anyone who depended on the establishment for much of his livelihood, skilfully hid it. If he wrote music for these plays, as he almost certainly did, they were published by Gherardi anonymously. He also took the precaution of not publishing the more obvious connections to Gherardi in his harpsichord pieces till Book III when it was safe.

By the time he reached Book IV Couperin was ill and clearly found it hard to finish putting it together. Many of the pieces have a sadly valedictory tone, especially the last Ordre of all. The 20th Ordre is, however, outgoing and humorous. 'La Princesse Marie' was the Polish fiancée of Louis XV, a pupil of Couperin. In the 'Air dans le Goût Polonois' he mocks the exaggerated knightly flourishes and bows of the visiting Polish dignitaries who delivered the princess, as did many Frenchmen. 'La Boufonne' is a joker. 'Les Chérubins' are blushing but willing maids and 'La Croüilli ou la Couperinète' Couperin's daughter. 'Madelon' and 'Janneton' are the actress Jeanne de Beauval, simpering in Molière's *Les Precieuses Ridicules* then as her sexy self, and 'La Sézile' a government official handing out alms.

The sad 21st Ordre is the story of a love affair, presumably Couperin's, that went wrong and the 22nd the humorous view of another. The 23rd Ordre includes portraits of the harlequin, Evaristo Gherardi, whose debut was known as *La tentative audacieuse*. 'L'Arlequine' is a harlequin chaconne with a direct reference to one of the plays published by Gherardi in his *Le Théâtre Italien*. Towards the end there is a series of discords which refer to a speech in which Harlequin is having a disastrous singing lesson. In answer to criticism he replies: 'Do you think I don't know that it's necessary to mark a dissonance there and that the octave comes in clashing with the unison, forming a B sharp minor?'

The 24th Ordre begins as it ends, satirising obsequious courtiers in 'Les Vieux Seigneurs' and 'L'Amphibie'. Dufresny comments: 'The courtier thinks carefully before he speaks [...] flatters those he scorns [...] what dissimulation', but 'Les Jeunes Seigneurs' ('les petits Maitres', the fops around the court) scarcely think at all: 'His speech is high and low, a mixture of the sublime and the trivial'. The music portrays this precisely. Amphibious was used to portray the ambitious courtier in the eighteenth century both by La Bruyère in his

Caractères, a copy of which Couperin possessed, and Alexander Pope in his portrait of the courtier Lord Hervey. 'Amphibious thing' he starts, and he mocks: 'wit that can creep and pride that licks the dust'. 'L'Amphibie' moves from its noble beginning through the caution and bowing and scraping needed at court and the resulting anger and sadness, to the final rogue G natural which may signify the scorn felt by Couperin at the dissimulation needed for success. On the way we have Cupid's fatal darts ('Les Dars-homicides'), the sexy garlands ('Les Guirlandes'), female vanities ('Les Brinborions'), a spoilt lap-dog ('La Divine-Babiche'), a vaudeville tune ('La belle Javotte') formerly the rejected fiancée of Louis XV ('L'Infante').

'Les Ombres Errantes' of the 25th Ordre, are the lost souls who could not descend into Hades because they had not received a proper burial ritual. This sad piece may refer to the theatrical friends of Couperin who were unable to receive a Christian burial. In the 26th Ordre 'La Sophie' is a Sofi, a whirling dervish, aptly described by the music, a reference to Gherardi's *Théâtre*, and 'L'Epineuse' is Maria Teresa d'Orsi, the Spinetta of Gherardi's troupe, a wistfully nostalgic piece. 'La Pantomime' is described by Gherardi, Scaramouche sits playing his guitar and Pasquariel comes

up noiselessly behind him and beats time on his shoulders, scaring him stiff.

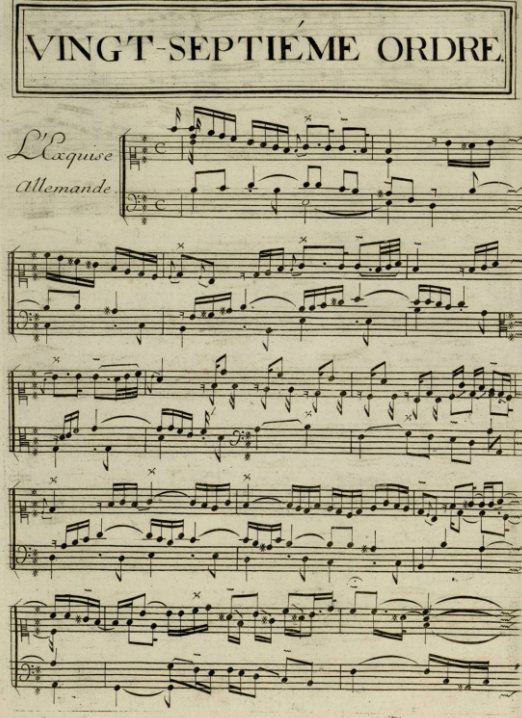
The 27th Ordre once more reveals Couperin's feelings towards the court of Versailles. Again based on a play, 'Les Chinois', by Regnard and Dufresny, in the scene described here Pegasus (symbolising literature) is portrayed as a winged ass, whose braying (the opening figure, used by Couperin in another situation too) keeps interrupting the conversation which is taking place on Mount Parnassus with Apollo (symbolising Louis XIV) and the Muses. The scene satirises the whole edifice of the court of Versailles. The second section is the ensemble of comic instruments as seen in the stage directions, probably originally incidental music. Saillie has many meanings, a jump, a joke, a brilliant shaft of wit or a reproach, perhaps referring to the many layers of meaning present in Couperin's *Pièces de Clavecin*. The first half is serious, including several statements of the famous 'lament' chromatic bass, whilst the leaping second part probably refers to the ballet of none too polite acrobatic tricks in 'Les Chinois'. This most human of composers has portrayed all aspects of human life in his intensely human music.

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VINGT-SEPTIÈME ORDRE

L'Exquise
Allemande



Guillermo Brachetta

Guillermo was born and grew up in Argentina and, albeit not a typical Argentinian, he still retains certain national characteristics including the love for cooking, the vehemency for debating and the passion for making music. Guillermo settled in The Netherlands in 1995 in order to perfect his skills in at least one of those disciplines.

He graduated from the Conservatory of Amsterdam and has collaborated as a soloist and basso continuo player with many renowned orchestras including the Residentie Orkest, Nederlands Kamerorkest and The New Dutch Academy. It is, however, in making chamber music that Guillermo's unique improvisational skills and his 'supple gravitas' on the harpsichord can be properly enjoyed.

His debut solo recording, *Ciaccona*, was released on Resonus Classics with enthusiastic reviews (*BBC Music Magazine* 'Instrumental Choice', May 2014) followed by *Divine Noise*, a recording of his own arrangement for two harpsichords of the opera *Platée* by Jean-Philippe Rameau, together with Dutch harpsichordist and former teacher Menno van Delft.

His latest solo album, *Concerto*, highlights some masterpieces by Johann Sebastian and Wilhelm Friedemann Bach.

A co-founder of successful Ensemble Fantasticus, he recorded five albums with this critically acclaimed Baroque ensemble.

Guillermo is very active as a researcher and music editor, working in close cooperation with Cambridge University Press and other international institutions, having prepared first editions of numerous works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

www.brachetta.com



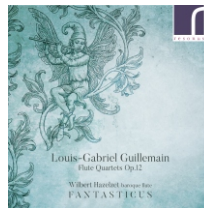


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Harpsichord supplied by Simon Neal (www.simon Neal.org.uk)

Producer, engineer & editor: Adam Binks

Recorded at 24-bit/96kHz resolution

Session & instrument photography © Resonus Limited

Cover image: *Der rupsen begin, voedzel en wonderbaare verandering, part III* (1717)

by Maria Sibylla Meriam (1647–1717)

Thanks are due to Joseph Taylor and Simon Neal for their assistance in making this recording.

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