

## 2. FRENCH BAROQUE SACRED CHORAL MUSIC 1643-1774

By Jason Allen Anderson

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- 1) Historical Context
  - a) Spanned the reigns of four Bourbon kings and three regents
  - b) Restrict our study to the last two regents and kings
    - i) Anne of Austria, Regent for Louis XIV (1643-1651)
    - ii) Louis XIV 'Le Roi Soleil' (1643-1715)
    - iii) Philippe d'Orléans, Regent for Louis XV (1715-1723)
    - iv) Louis XV (1715-1774)
- 2) Hallmarks of the French Baroque Musical Style
  - a) *Galant* "ornamented with many small figures and passages" (Grove Online)
  - b) *Rococo* "A term from decorative art that has been applied by analogy to music, especially French music, of the 18th century" (Grove Online)
    - i) Originated in France during the last years of the 17th century
    - ii) Born of a relaxation of the rules of French classicism
    - iii) Derivation of the term (*rocaille*, 'shellwork') is post facto and pejorative, like most critical descriptions of the style
  - c) Slow to adopt Italian innovations, such as *oratorio*, *basso continuo*, the recitative, the formal aria, and the *concertato*
  - d) Church music in France is very different from church music elsewhere on the continent (Palisca 265).
    - i) Causes of reluctance to adopt above innovations include:
      - (1) Control of the monarch (often at the insistence of Lully) on all matters related to music, art, architecture, dance—in essence all the fine and performing arts in an attempt to cultivate a French national style; consequently,
      - (2) Musicians from other parts of Europe rarely found employment in the musical establishments of both court and church in France; thus, the other national styles were unable to penetrate those establishments through foreigners.
      - (3) Finally, the Ballard family, the monopolistic royal music printers, kept tight control over all music published in France and favored music produced by French hands over those of foreigners. This monopoly lasted up until the development of printing from engraved plates, as the royal monopoly extended to movable type printing only.
  - e) Keyboard
    - i) French keyboard composers were untouched by the development of the ritornello and sonata forms and wrote in more established, French styles
    - ii) Dances and genre pieces for harpsichord, and to short liturgical and secular works for the organ abounded; François Couperin and Jean-Philippe Rameau are primary composers of note
    - iii) Organ masses prevalent as well
    - iv) French noëls for organ; Daquin is the primary example
  - f) Flute school
    - i) A defining element was the development of the French flute school

- (1) The flute was highly favored in France, along with other woodwind instruments, so French composers of this period utilize larger woodwind complements than composers in other countries
- (2) This love of woodwinds extended to French organs and organ building of this time as well
- g) Ornammentation
  - i) Sadie sums up French ornamentation best: “No single aspect of Baroque performance distinguished more sharply between French and Italian styles than ornamentation. French tables of ornaments abound, giving precise explications of the many symbols, often confusing and inconsistent...in other instrumental and vocal music a simple + served to indicate that some embellishment at the performer’s option was needed” (411)
  - ii) Consult Donington, Anthony and Sadie for more information
- h) Orchestration and orchestras
  - i) The musicians of the chapel included lay and ecclesiastical singers, organists, a string band and a cornettist
  - ii) For special services their numbers were augmented by the voices of women and Italian castrati, as well as instruments from the chamber and Écurie
    - (1) Écurie musicians included brass, woodwind, and percussionists whose regular duties included playing for parades, hunts, and other outdoor ceremonial activities
    - (2) Chamber musicians included lute, viol, and harpsichord players; later this was expanded to include petit violins and flutes
- i) Performance practice
  - i) The principle mark of French music is *notes inégales*, or unequal notes
    - (1) Sadie notes, “French musicians habitually introduced dotted rhythms in successions of conjunct notes, usually quavers [eighth notes], even where the notation did not indicate.” (Sadie 410)
    - (2) Not all conjunct eighth notes were performed dotted! In fact, late 18th century French music treatises describe the meters and dances for which *notes égales* [equal notes] are required
  - ii) Regarding accompanying of polyphonic music in France, Wienandt asserts that, in France, choral style motets and Masses were unaccompanied with the use of organ to support singers only in parochial churches
    - (1) Instruments were limited to music at court and the larger churches and cathedrals
    - (2) “The royal taste is evident in orchestral accompaniments for Masses and motets performed at court. A considerable interest was shown in writing for soloists and solo ensembles in the motets” (Wienandt 28)
  - iii) There is a considerable evidence to support tuning A=440 **down one whole step** to A=392 for French Baroque music. See Donington and the liner notes of many CDs.
  - iv) Pronunciation of Latin in France
    - (1) Pronunciation of Latin in France (both historically and presently) differs in many respects to standardized Church Latin
    - (2) Consideration should be given to use of French Latin for two reasons
      - (a) It is a good experience for both conductor and choir; and,
      - (b) It opens up vowel colors unavailable in Italianized Latin, especially nasalized vowels

### 3) Primary Genres

#### a) *Petit motet*

“The two types that had specific French designations, the *petit motet* and the *grand motet*, used both solo and chorus, along with some kind of accompaniment.” The *petit motet* might have one or more solo voices, chorus, and an orchestra or only a continuo group (Wienandt 28).

#### b) *Grand motet*

Comprised of several contrasting musical ideas on a larger scale, with more people, and in several movements (Wienandt 28) and was scored for soloists (*petit choeur*), full chorus (*grand choeur*), and orchestra (of two to five parts).

##### i) General notes about the petit and grand motet

- (1) From Italy, the motet borrows arias, recitatives, and the like, which themselves were a result of Italian theatrical experiments
- (2) “A peculiarly French music innovation” (Sadie 95) akin to cantatas, verse anthems, and the like, but very different in function and purpose.
- (3) Used Latin liturgical texts, often with dual meanings for King (as in God) and King (as in the ruler of France)
- (4) These were performed at Mass for the king in lieu of settings of the Mass Ordinary

#### c) Oratorio

- i) Largely ignored by the French
- ii) Charpentier composed many oratorios, but usually called them by another name, like *historia*, *canticum*, *motet*, or *dialogue*
- iii) Other composers used the name *histoire sacrée*
- iv) Regardless, the *oratorio* is a concerted, biblically based story, utilizing soloists, chorus, and orchestra.

#### d) Masses

- i) Masses exist for composers prior to Louis XIV
- ii) The king’s preference for Low Mass and the motet effectively killed the genre for composers employed by the crown
- iii) Anthony states that despite this, polyphonic Masses continued to be written, counting 118 Masses by 43 composers from Lassus to Campra (270).

### **Selected Composers and Works**

#### ***Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687)***

- Enjoyed the favor of King Louis XIV despite his homosexuality (Sadie 96 and 129).
- Acquired the *Académie Royale de Musique* and was granted a monopoly on musical entertainment in Paris.
- Lully was “an Italian who made his way to France in his early youth, brought French music to a high point that set the standard for the following generation at home and also touched several important places abroad” (Wienandt 30).
- He “regularized the orchestral practice of his day by organizing, with the king’s approval, a group superior to the famous *vingt-quatre violons* of which he had been a member, and by insisting on a uniform performance style to be perfected at regular rehearsals” (Wienandt 30).

- Lully’s influence on the musical life of France during his lifetime cannot be overstated. Lully limited Parisians to one opera per year, counseled the king on all matters musical, and crushed any composer that he saw as a personal threat. Upon his death, musical life in France took a nosedive (Sadie 130).
  - Lully made it a practice of conducting, using a large baton.
  - In his motets, the orchestra typically doubles the chorus; in addition, the harmony is static and the form more loosely sectionalized (Anthony 221).
  - His *Te Deum* comprises 45 minutes of music, and is one of the “most memorable exemplars of the *grand motet*” (Palisca 277). Conducting this piece cost Lully his life. During a performance of it in January 1687, Lully beat time so fervently that he injured his foot, developed gangrene, and died two and a half months later.
- Example 4: ‘Te gloriosus’ from *Te Deum*. Note the SSAB/SSABB double choir construct as well as the 5-part orchestra, for which Lully required 24 violins, oboes, flutes, trumpets, and drums (an orchestra that other European courts envied).

### ***Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1634-1704)***

- Fused things Italian and French and was one of the first French composers to study (with Carissimi) in Italy, where he picked up the polychoral and concertato styles and was introduced to the sonata, cantata, and oratorio.
  - “Gregorian chant and popular *noëls*, Italian oratorio and cantata, French overture and dance measure, archaic polyphony and regal Versailles motet—all combine in the religious music of Charpentier” (Anthony 229).
  - Never held a court position, and with a few exceptions, most of his music went unpublished in his lifetime due to the strong-arm tactics of Lully.
  - This is not to say the king did not care for his music. In fact, the king on one occasion dismissed his own court musicians so that he might hear some of Charpentier’s motets (Palisca 288).
  - Appointed *maître de musique* at the Sainte-Chapelle in 1698, a post second only to the *maître de musique* of the Chapelle Royale.
  - The bulk of his music remains in manuscript
  - Works include 11 Masses, 84 psalm settings, 207 motets, and other works, including several oratorios. His oratorios *Filius prodigus* and *Judicium Salomonis* are mentioned in many history texts. No French composer after Charpentier took an interest in oratorio (Palisca 291).
  - Three of his best known sacred works are *In nativitate Domini canticum*, *Messe de Minuit*, and the *Missa assumpta est Maria*.
  - His motets vacillate between sectional and non-sectional forms, creating a bridge from old to new French motet styles.
- Example 5: *Laudate Dominum* for eight voices and the same number of instruments. The eight voices are really two mixed choruses, though Charpentier also employs eight soloists, drawn from the *premier choeur*. The work is scored for violins I and II, and flutes (doubling the violins). These are the only specific instruments named; the rest are grouped into two equally balanced tutti ‘*tous*’ choirs of instruments as well as a basso continuo group throughout. Note the independence of the two choirs.

### **Michel-Richard Delalande (1657-1726)**

- Delalande is the spelling he himself used on all legal documents, however, when looking him up in library databases, use Lalande, Michel-Richard de.
  - His motets “are imbued with an overall spirituality that transcends chapel and concert hall alike” (Anthony 237) and Delalande “understood Latin prosody better than most of his contemporaries, and he took pains to choose the musical motives best suited for individual words or phrases” (Anthony 239).
  - Parisian organist, harpsichordist, chorister, and a promising violinist, until Lully crushed his spirits by denying him a place in the Academy orchestra.
  - He was among four who won a competition for the title *sous-maître* at the Chapelle Royale, with the approval of Lully, and by 1714 had assumed complete control there as the other three retired.
  - Among his sacred works are 64 extant *grands motets*.
  - Delalande’s *grand choeur* typically consisted of soprano, haute-contre [H] (high tenor), tenor, baritone, and bass, and also favored an orchestra in five parts (all strings), which was augmented with oboes, flutes, bassoons, and continuo.
  - The *De profundis* is a prime example of a fully concerted *grand motet*, with each verse being set in a unique way. For example, the ‘Requiem aeternam dona eis’ is a fugue, while other verses are for the soloists of the *petit choeur*.
- Example 6: ‘Et laudamus nomen tuum in saeculum’ from *Te Deum*. Note the SHTBarB *petit choeur*.

### **Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)**

- Music historians remember Rameau for his contributions in the realm of opera and music theory, but his sacred works, though small in number [he wrote only four *grands motets*] are equally important.
  - As a theorist, Rameau coined the terms tonic, dominant, and subdominant. His music reveals a better understanding of harmony than Lully’s (Palisca 232).
  - Contributions to the *grand motet* include “division into sections, emphasis on alternation between solo and chorus, expansion of orchestra forces, and some sections with polyphonic texture” (Wienandt 32).
  - The *récits* employ the “shifting meter of French recitative, which is rarely found in Latin music” (Anthony 264).
- Example 8: ‘In convertendo’ and ‘Tunc repletum est gaudio’ from *In convertendo*. Note the heavily ornamented orchestration and solo voice part for the ‘In convertendo’ and contrast with the unadorned *grand choeur* parts of the ‘Tunc repletum est gaudio.’ Also examine the orchestration, with separate parts for flutes, oboes, and bassoons.

### **Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville (1711-1772)**

- Celebrated violinist for the French courts at Paris and Versailles who rose from the ranks to become *sous-maître* in 1740, and *intendant* in 1744.
- His writing is simpler, and perhaps more easily understood than his contemporaries.
- His motets, like many others, were “meant to be enjoyed only by a specialized audience in situations not directly connected with the religious experience” (Wienandt 32).
- His motets *Jubilate Deo*, *Venite exultemus*, and *Nisi Dominus* were performed annually for decades.

- Example 9: Excerpt of ‘Sicut erat in principio’ from *Jubilate Deo*. Note the SATBB chorus and 5-part orchestra (the three treble lines are violins and the other two parts are for bass instruments). Also note that Mondoville notates trills (+) in the choir parts frequently.

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## Appendix 1

### Properties of the Modes

from *Règles de Composition par M<sup>r</sup> Charpentier*

(Anthony, p. 231)

C major: Gay and warlike  
C minor: Obscure and sad  
D minor: Grave and pious  
D major: Joyous and very warlike  
E minor: Effeminate, amorous, and plaintive  
E major: Quarrelsome and peevish  
E-flat major: Cruel and severe  
E-flat minor: Horrible, frightful  
F major: Furious and quick tempered  
F minor: Obscure and plaintive  
G major: Quietly joyful  
G minor: Serious and magnificent  
A minor: Tender and plaintive  
A major: Joyous and pastoral  
B-flat major: Magnificent and joyous  
B-flat minor: Obscure and terrifying  
B minor: Lonely and melancholy  
B major: Severe and plaintive