Nine Seventeenth-Century Organ Transcriptions from the Operas of Lully

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NINE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ORGAN TRANSCRIPTIONS FROM THE OPERAS OF LULLY

ALMONTE C. HOWELL, JR.
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ORGAN TRANSCRIPTIONS
from the Operas of Lully

Edited with an Introduction by
ALMONTE C. HOWELL, JR.

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### INTRODUCTION

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JEAN-BAPTISTE LULLY is perhaps best known in the history of music as the founder of French opera. Although Italian-born himself, he created a form of opera so suited to French tastes and needs that it alone, among the attempts of various other nations at operatic forms of their own, was able to resist domination by Italian opera and to maintain its individual identity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Lully's hold upon opera in France during the period of his productivity in that field, from 1673 to 1687, was partly political, for the wily Florentine succeeded in obtaining for himself privileges that gave him a position of dominance over the operatic scene comparable to that of his master Louis XIV over the political scene. But again like his master, Lully bolstered his position with the force of his own personality and talent. The impress he made upon French music was enormous, and it affected every musical medium of his day—the church as well as the theater, the people as well as the court. Evidence of his influence in a field as remote from his own as the literature for the organ is seen in the nine pieces that make up this present collection.

These nine transcriptions appear in a single manuscript volume of organ music of the late seventeenth century catalogued as Ré. 2094 in the library of the Paris Conservatory. Although the volume has often been attributed to the Parisian organist and clavecinist Jean-Nicolas Geoffroy, the basis for this attribution is highly questionable, and until further evidence is presented, the volume must be treated as anonymous. It exemplifies a typical practical workbook—perhaps even instruction book—containing all the types of pieces that would be used by an organist of the period. Its content consists chiefly of brief liturgical versets for various parts of the Mass and Office; in addition, there are preludes, offertories, fugues, noels, dance pieces, and, toward the conclusion, the nine pieces arranged from Lully's operas. Many features of the style, orthography, and ornamentation point toward the period 1670-1690 as the time of the volume's compilation. The Lully pieces themselves may justify our surmising an even more exact date for it—1679 or shortly thereafter—since five of the seven operas of Lully up to 1679 are represented, but nothing appears from the equally numerous and popular group of operas after that date.

Despite the fact that some of the operas represented in this collection were not printed until the early eighteenth century, there is little point in speculating as to the exact source from which the transcriber could have gotten his material, for Lully's operatic music was in wide circulation from its first performance onward. The studies of Prunières show that a varied assortment of manuscripts existed from early times and that manuscript copies were authorized by the composer to be sold at the door of the theater. A manuscript copy of the score could, in fact, be produced at a cost quite comparable to that of a copy from an engraved edition. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the largest number of selections in the Conservatory organ manuscript come from Isis, the first of the Lullian operas to appear partially in an engraved edition.
Example 1. Opening of the Overture to Alceste: orchestral score

Example 2. Duo from the Prologue to Atys: treble and bass voices
the instrumental pieces from Isis were printed in Paris in 1677, two years before the earliest date that could possibly be assigned to our present collection.

All the operatic selections chosen for transcription in Rés. 2094 were originally instrumental numbers, except No. 8, from Atys, a duo for soprano and baritone with continuo. Of the remaining numbers, most were scored for the typical five-part string orchestra of Lully's productions. In the marchlike numbers (Nos. 3, 7, and 9) trumpets and drums would have been required in addition to the strings; indeed, they were in part specified in the original. The scores of the three overtures show only string parts, but Prunières states that oboes, flute, and bassoons usually doubled the strings in the performances of Lully's time. The two minuets were probably played by strings alone.

The following table shows the original place of each piece within the opera from which it was taken. The table is arranged chronologically according to the date of the first performance of each opera, but the number that each piece bears in this collection is given in brackets.

Alceste (1674)
Overture: [No. 6]
Prologue: Rondeau accompanying the entrance of La Gloire [No. 7]

Thésée (1675)
Act I, Scene xi: "Entrée des Sacrificateurs et des Combattants" [No. 9]

Atys (1676)
Prologue: Duo between Flore and Le Temps [No. 8]

Isis (1677)
Overture: [No. 2]
Prologue: Prélude preceding a choral ensemble [No. 3]
"2e Air pour les Muses" [No. 5]
Act III, Scene xi: Introduction to the dialogue between Pan and Syrinx [No. 4]

Bellérophon (1679)
Overture: [No. 1]

These keyboard transcriptions from the works of Lully are not unique in the seventeenth century. More widely known are those that appeared in the harpsichord collection of 1689 published by Jean-Henri d'Anglebert, clavecinist to Louis XIV. If the examples from the Conservatory manuscript are as early as we have suggested, they might very well have served as models for those of Anglebert, for certainly the transcription methods are quite similar. Anglebert's volume contains material from some of the late operas as well as from the earlier group. The present publication supplements it very nicely, for there is not a single duplication between the Lully selections in the two volumes.

Both Anglebert and the anonymous organ transcriber use the same method of arranging Lully's orchestral music for keyboard. They retain, with a few liberties, the upper or melodic voice and the bass line or continuo, but provide their own harmony for the inner parts, suited to the limitations of the keyboard idiom. Not only are the inner voices freely adapted to the keyboard, but they frequently form different harmonic progressions from those seen in the scores of the original operas. This is quite natural, for there was nothing sacrosanct about the inner parts of Lully's texture. Many of the manuscript versions of the operas and even some of the printed versions left them out entirely and contained only the outer parts. Furthermore, Lully himself was notoriously casual about the inner voices, and often he left their composition to his students. Example 1 shows the original orchestral texture of the opening of the Overture to Alceste, which may be compared with its transcription, No. 6 in this collection, for a demonstration of the changes made in the inner voices.

The comparison between the two further reveals that even in the outer voices many small divergences occur between the original and the transcription. Most of these changes are in the nature of embellishment, since the basic rhythm and melodic direction of the original melodic lines are retained. Small changes are seen in the ornaments, which differ both in the types called for and in their location, in passing notes, in repeated notes, in the octave levels of the bass notes, and in the rhythms of short motives. As a further illustration of these changes, Example 2 reproduces the original notes from the beginning of the duo from the Prologue to Atys (No. 8 among the transcriptions). This number, incidentally, is the only one in the collection that has been transposed in the transcription from its original pitch.

The transcriber has taken an even greater liberty with three of the pieces, the minuet from Act III of Isis and the marches from Alceste and Thésée (Nos. 4, 7, and 9). These are supplied with basses that differ markedly from those of the original and bring about quite different harmonies. In each case the transcriber has endeavored to enrich the harmony of the original. By comparison to Lully's rather stationary tonic-dominant chord sequence, the transcriptions show faster harmonic rhythm and a greater variety of chords. Perhaps the transcriber felt that Lully's original harmonies sounded too insipid without the color of the original orchestration, or perhaps he had available only the melody itself, to which he was obligated to supply harmony of his own. Since all three are simple melodies in a rather popular style, it is possible that they were simply reproduced from memory rather than from the notes. Example 3 shows the first strain of the march from Thésée in Lully's harmonization, for comparison with the transcription, No. 9. (The example is taken from the piano reduction in the edition Chef's d'œuvre de l'opéra français, ca. 1880.)

In the Conservatory manuscript only two different signs of embellishment appear, a rather carelessly produced trill sign and the coulé, a diagonal bar between two chord notes. Unlike the published collections, this manuscript
contains no table of interpretation of the ornaments. A study of the manuscript as a whole, however, indicates that a distinction must have been intended according to whether the trill sign is placed above the note to which it applies or below it. If the practice of some of the published collections of this period has been followed, it may perhaps be safely surmised that when placed below the note, the sign designates a mordent, and when above, a trill. Occasionally the trill sign seems to contain a few extra flourishes. This would probably indicate the double cadence, and be interpreted as a trill concluding with a turn. In this edition the suggested interpretation of the ornaments, based on contemporary French tables, is as follows:

With regard to performance practices, two other suggestions seem especially a propos, from among the many that are found in the writings of composers and theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both apply especially to this music, since they were observed by both the organists and the orchestral players of France. (1) Series of eighth notes written as if equal in value should be played with the strong notes lengthened and the weak ones shortened. The usual interpretation is to play them like series of dotted eighths followed by sixteenths. The music is thus given a lilting quality not entirely unlike that of jazz today, where a similar custom prevails. (2) Notes written as dotted values should be lengthened beyond their notated values, and the shorter notes following them should be even further shortened. The usual interpretation is to play the dotted value like a double-dotted note and to halve the value of the note or group of notes following. This practice will especially apply to the opening sections of each of the overtures, where many dotted notes occur within a slow tempo. The effect will greatly enhance the grandeur and pompousness associated with these movements.

The Lully pieces in the Conservatory manuscript are without any hint of organ registration. The fact that their source is secular might suggest that they were actually intended for harpsichord. However, their presence in a collection of which the great majority of the pieces are organ music of a distinctly liturgical function, and the fact that they differ little from these in keyboard style, would seem to give sufficient ground for considering them organ music. Collateral support lies in the fact that sacred contrafacta were made from many of Lully's more popular vocal numbers for use in the service of worship. Furthermore, the similarity of the transcriptions to much of the music composed for organ in this period serves to point up more clearly the strong influence upon seventeenth-century French organ music of the styles of secular
music. These Lully transcriptions have a place in the history of organ music as a sort of visible link between the purely secular music and the secular-tinged organ music of the time.

Despite the lack of indications for registration, several suggestions for it may be made on the basis of the similarity between the Lully transcriptions and much of the organ music published in the late seventeenth century with very explicit directions for registration. The overtures should probably be played on a type of registration described in that time as *Grand ieu*; this means that foundations, mixtures, and reeds were all used together—in other words, full organ—a type of registration favored for pieces that imitated the texture of the full orchestra. It might be well to withdraw the reed chorus for the fast fugal sections of the overtures, or perhaps change to a lighter registration on another manual. The remaining pieces are less homogeneous in texture and may very likely have been treated as solo melodies with accompaniment. In each of them the right hand is chiefly confined to the melody notes alone (except at cadences) and the left hand contains the complete accompaniment. The accompaniments, played on a lighter keyboard, should be of foundation stops—flutes and stopped diapasons for the softer numbers, open diapasons in addition for the louder ones. For the solo voice such stops as the tierce, cornet, cromhorne, or solo flute would be appropriate in the softer pieces, while trompette seems to be indicated for the marches. In the latter numbers particularly, the familiar French dialogue treatment is effective: to achieve this, each strain should be played the first time with the right hand on the trompette and the left hand on the accompaniment, and then each repeat should be taken with both hands on the trompette. Pedals were seldom called for in the French organ music of this time, other than for cantus firmi or for very slow, sustained bass lines. No

music in the entirety of *Rép. 2094* gives any indication of their use. One may find, however, that judicious doubling of the lowest voice by the pedals will make some of these pieces more effective on the modern organ.

The editorial policy of this edition has been to adhere as closely to the original musical text as possible without detriment to modern practical performance. Modern clefs have had to be substituted for some of the original ones, but the latter are indicated at the beginning of each piece. The few obvious errors in the original have been corrected, with indications of the original notation. The editor has occasionally taken the liberty of enriching the texture by added notes when the original seemed needlessly thin. The original, after all, lacked the finish that would have been given to a published edition. All such additions are clearly shown through the use of smaller notes. In the marches in rondeau form, the first strain has been written out in full between each couplet in place of the original notation, in which it was given only once at the beginning. The titles have been reproduced as they stood in the original, but editorial amplifications of the titles and the connection of each piece with the original opera have been added in brackets when needed. The order in which the pieces occur in this edition is that of the original.

Despite their operatic origins, the Lully transcriptions should be useful to the present-day church organist. The pieces have, after all, no secular associations for listeners today. The overtures make excellent preludes for festive services, and the marches are suitable both for processional and postludes. For recital use, several of the pieces could be very successfully grouped together into a suite. One might, for example, begin with one of the overtures, include one or more of the quieter pieces in the middle, and conclude with one of the marches.
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No. 1. L'OUVERTURE DE BELLEROPHON
No. 2. L'OUVERTURE D'ISIS

* Barline omitted in original manuscript
No. 3. TROMPETTE DE L’OPERA [Prelude from the Prologue to Isis]
No. 4. MENUET [Air from Isis, Act III, Scene xi]
No. 5. MENÜETT [2è Air pour les Muses, from the Prologue to Isis]
No. 6. L'OUVERTURE DE L'OPERA D'ALCESTE
No. 7. MARCHE DE L'OPERA [Rondeau from the Prologue to Alceste]
No. 8. PIECE DE L'OPERA [Duo from the Prologue to Atys]
No. 9. LA MARCHE  [Entrée des Sacrificateurs, from Thésée, Act I, Scene xi]