

Jean-Henry D'Anglebert
Pièces de clavessin en manuscrits
Paola Erdas / Arcana A337

A small, oblong-shaped volume in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France under the heading 'Fonds du Conservatoire Rés. 89ter': this manuscript contains pieces by various composers including d'Anglebert, Chambonnières, Louis Couperin, Lully, Marais, Pinel, Ennemond and Denis Gaultier, Mézangeau and Richard. It was back in the 1970s that this precious manuscript was attributed with near-certainty to Jean-Henry d'Anglebert, thus rightly becoming one of the most representative sources of 17th-century music. This is a unicum, in that other autograph manuscripts for keyboard instruments by French composers of the 17th century are lacking, the only autograph sources from that period being those of Tomkins, Froberger and Poglietti. Henceforth, we have a manuscript for each national school.

The contents of this volume were not frozen in time: in addition to those in d'Anglebert's hand-writing, we can identify four other hands, almost certainly attributable to successive periods. d'Anglebert's writing is elegant and meticulous, the work of a highly cultivated, refined man, one who appreciated a fine line. This is a notebook for personal use, a collection bringing together the most appreciated pieces of music, the most studied repertoire, best representing the personal vision of a musical aesthetic and giving us the opportunity to look (as through a keyhole) into d'Anglebert's apartments to discover what he liked to play.

Of the 48 pieces in his handwriting, twenty are by d'Anglebert himself, and amongst those, the majority (13 of them) present in the printed oeuvre, the *Pièces de Clavecin*, published in 1689 at his own expense. Therein he also shows to their advantage compositions by his teacher, Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, creator of the new French harpsichord style. These are pieces already found in other sources but slightly revised here, enriched by doubles (varied versions) in d'Anglebert's hand. One can reasonably assert that the manuscript pieces predate the printed edition and are likely datable to between 1670 and 1680; some of the pieces found in both collections in fact present more 'rudimentary' writing in the manuscript than in the published work.

Yet, in my opinion, it is with his transcriptions of lute music that d'Anglebert achieves the summits: not only due to his mastery in translating the language of another instrument, but also the authority of style, which he exploits in the full expressiveness of its range. These pieces have a double musical importance: if, on the one hand, they clearly affirm the French keyboard style beginning with Chambonnières, on the other, they are the key-stone of the transition between the two instruments of the Grand Siècle, the lute and the harpsichord. These two instruments are closely correlated and, in the latter half of the 17th century, their repertoire blends and crosses, the dusk of the one combining with the dawn of the other – a continuity of style more than evident in d'Anglebert, but also in Louis Couperin and Froberger.

It is quite interesting to see how, in the Pieces, the works written originally for lute belong to the generation preceding the composer's – if not two generations earlier. This is testimony to the actuality and durability of a repertoire that was evidently still widely played and appreciated by the public. Ennemond Gaultier, called Le Vieux (the Elder) to distinguish him from his cousin Denis, 28 years younger, is the most representative and best represented composer in the collection, after d'Anglebert. Unanimously considered the greatest figure of the French lute school, he left an indelible mark on the style of his successors, by which I mean not only lutenists but also, as may be observed from the manuscript, harpsichordists. The sole piece by René Mézangeau, Ennemond Gaultier's teacher, already reveals this expressive profundity that will generate the extraordinary works of his student. The latter would dedicate a magnificent Tombeau to him, of which we have a version also intended for harpsichord: *Pieces de Luth en Musique avec des Regles pour les toucher parfaitement sur le Luth et sur le Clavessin* (Paris, 1680) by Perrine.

How might the connections between the lute and harpsichord in France be explained; how might we understand to what degree the nascent style of the 'new' instrument drew on the 'old'; how to enter this particular world in which two plucked-string instruments – so different and yet, at the same time, so similar – co-existed for a brief period? To speak of the death of the lute in favour of the harpsichord simply because the latter was capable of playing louder would be an error to the detriment of both instruments!

It would be like claiming that the piano supplanted the harpsichord because it could play piano and forte or, worse yet, because it was a 'better' instrument. Rather, it was a matter of closing one window to open another giving on to a different panorama, each of them rich in complexity and having its own coherence. It is from our situation as contemporary lovers of the past that comes the privilege of wandering about this house and opening our eyes sometimes to this landscape, sometimes to that one – a privilege that cannot be exercised without the love and respect that are its due.

The lute reached its apogee under the reign of Louis XIII, a man of introverted nature and himself an impassioned lutenist. He ruled during difficult years, often in the shadow of his terrible mother and his advisor, Richelieu, who was even more implacable. In the course of those years, the simple fact of playing the lute became a symbol of social evolution; devoting oneself to this instrument offering boundless nuances through music that miraculously manages to combine delicacy and extreme passion, signified the entrance into a world both aesthetic and politically acceptable. The king's character and aesthetic preferences were law, his person, as introverted as it was proud, inevitably having repercussions on the musical environment.

The son of Louis XIII changed this style radically: by his character and for political reasons, he modified the court's – and, consequently, music's – essentials. This was not a radical, difficult revolution but rather a subtle yet firm turning point towards that grandiose spirit, rich in pomp, embodied by the monarch, to the point of his being dubbed the Sun King. Louis' reaction to the tragic experiences of the Fronde was to keep the nobility in check with court life that was as sumptuous as it was pitiless in its ultra-rigid etiquette, this determining a new lease on musical life through the affirmation of a man who embodied this concept musically: Jean-Baptiste Lully. So French opera, the stage, the ballet: grandeur made into music. The intimate world of the lute survived but gradually lost its importance; no longer

dominant, it became the other face of the reign, its more refined voice, the portrait versus the hagiographic allegory. The harpsichord emerged and asserted itself in this new world since, I like to think, it succeeded in representing both of these worlds, pomp and refinement. There is one thing the harpsichord does better than the lute: reproducing the best-known works and tunes, sumptuous overtures. This was a godsend for members of the nobility as well as for those of the bourgeoisie who could not always manage to attend Lully's staggering productions in person.

In d'Anglebert's manuscript pieces, we find both aspects of this new reign : transcriptions of works by his friend Lully and transcriptions of lute pieces through this new style suitable for the harpsichord. I intentionally left out the operas transcriptions, giving preference to their less-explored aspect, which I would like to define as more personal as well as more interesting from the stylistic point of view.

d'Anglebert's Chaconne in C major is perhaps the piece that best illustrates this network of connections between the harpsichord and the lute ; it is intended for the harpsichord, but seems written for the lute more than other compositions written specifically for it !

The transcription technique of the pieces is absolutely perfect, adapting to the instrument all the lute's nuances and removing none of its original spirit. When d'Anglebert intervenes heavily on the sound compass, he always does so in the interest of the music ; it is never a vain upheaval. In fact, whereas making the harmonic fabric denser on the harpsichord, one obtains a more substantial, 'stronger' sound, when it concerns the lute, the opposite occurs. By exploiting this principle, d'Anglebert plays with the voices, creating, writing a precise dynamic in his music, inscribing on the paper what the interpretation of the period represented. Furthermore, when the transcriptions deviate widely from the original, we must recall that, nowadays, certain kinds of music are preserved in non-autograph version, such as copyists' works, thereby introducing the possibility that d'Anglebert might have had access to a source unknown to us.

The manuscript, like this CD, begins with a very brief, perfect unbarred prelude in the style of Louis Couperin, i.e., all in equal values - unlike what d'Anglebert will do in the printed edition. The Allemande that follows pursues the discourse in very elegant style, far from pomp. On the other hand, pomp and eloquence are to be found in Chambonnières' Courantes. His student's intervention is interesting : the harmonic tessitura is decidedly improved, and the left hand takes on a dignity lacking in the composer's version, whereas the doubles further enrich the pieces. The affection that manifestly linked him to his master is joined by the esteem for his colleague Louis Couperin of whom he brings back a monumental Allemande, followed by an even more impressive Double. The choice of a single piece as imposing in its dimensions as in its musical density also reveals d'Anglebert's taste for complex architectonic forms. One sole piece from the collection eludes an exact attribution : the Sarabande (with a double by d'Anglebert) by Richard. According to the most documented hypothesis, this is allegedly Etienne Richard, a composer-organist and contemporary of d'Anglebert, but it may also be thought that it be a tribute to works for lute : a François Richard père and a François Richard fils were both lutenists active at the king's court. The piece with which the CD ends is an extraordinary Sarabande by Marin Marais, which does not correspond to any other piece for viola da gamba published by the composer at the time. Nor does it seem to be a transcription from an

opera, given that d'Anglebert always provides the origin of incidental music. The rich writing, complete from the point of view of keyboard compositional technique, might bring to mind another unicum, the sole piece written for keyboard by Marais. But however fascinating it might be, this is obviously only a hypothesis.

Almost fanatical in his pursuit of detail, Jean-Henry d'Anglebert has sometimes been reputed to be a complicated composer, precise to excess. But the magnificent precision of his writing, combined with his precious and exhaustive table of grace notes, lies within this tradition of attention to the slightest element and the smallest variant of expression and phrasing, which leads straight from the France of the 17th century to Debussy. This is not a form of 'graceful', vain auxiliary notes, but a profound, intense musical vision, of which the grace note is an integral part, indissociable from an aesthetic-musical discourse.

One final remark concerning the sound. Master Chambonnières was famous for his 'flowing playing', the 'fluid sound' that moved hearts. This line of thinking was evidently taken up by d'Anglebert, judging from the slurs and the handling of parts that naturally lead to an intense legato sound. This is a perception of touch in which I profoundly recognize myself, a technique that goes from the application of velocity to the quest for beauty of timbre. The study of sound on the harpsichord is always essential but, if possible, it is even more indispensable in this music, written and thought out to extract all the soul from mechanical plucking. Obviously less flexible than the lute, the sound of the harpsichord nonetheless has capacities of colour and nuance in the articulations (by articulations I of course mean legato) that make the sound of this marvellous machine sensible and so human. This sound research was certainly facilitated by the harpsichord I used for this recording: an original harpsichord by Louis Denis, dated 1658 and placed at my disposal by the current owner, Mr François Badoud. The Denis has an ideal sound for performing d'Anglebert's music : a sumptuously French sonority with lingering traces of a certain Italian brilliance, which permits the 'fluid sound' to perfection whilst preserving the detail of the parts and ornamentation.

PAOLA ERDAS

Translated by John Tyler Tuttle

THE LOUIS DENIS HARPSICHORD, 1658
restored by Reinhard von Nagel (2004-05)

It was in 1658 – the year of Henry Purcell's birth, in that magical latter half of the 17th century that would see the music of J. J. Froberger and Louis Couperin come into being – that Louis Denis (1635-1711) authenticated this instrument by his signature in sanguine, under the soundboard : 'Made by Louis Denis in Paris 1658' with three five-pointed stars arranged in a triangle, the typical signature of several instrument-making members of the Denis family.

Louis Denis was one of the numerous builders of the Denis dynasty spanning five generations between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 18th. This Louis was a Denis from the third generation.

Yet the soundboard features a rose in sculpted gilt wood bearing the initials 'BS'. We can reasonably conjecture that those are the initials of the builder Benoît Stehlin, since an inventory drawn up 15 July 1774, after his death, lists a Denis harpsichord that was then in his workshop : 'Item a harpsichord in very poor [working] order without jacks or strings, made in Paris by Louis Denis'. Perhaps the Denis instrument was in this work-shop for repair and the 'BS' rose was added at that moment to replace the damaged original. It is possible, too, that the floral decoration of the ribs was added at that time, comparable in every way to the famous Benoît Stehlin of 17??, owned by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC.

The painting of the cover and the lid allegedly depict an episode from Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (canto XIV, 1581) : the soldiers Carlo and Ubaldo, having gone off in search of Rinaldo, held by Armida, meet an old mage who warns them against love's temptations. The landscape is inspired by the valley of the Tiber.

The instrument has come down to us in good condition with an exceptionally well-preserved sound-board. This board, painted with its original pretty floral decoration, contains what would be a unique pictorial element: a may bug. The presence of this erratic, noisy woodboring insect on a soundboard is astonishing and would therefore be apotropaic : chasing evil with evil !

The base undoubtedly dates from the beginning of the 20th century. Before restoration, the two keyboards (50 keys GG/BB-c''; short octave; coupler with drawknob) featured the following layout: I-8'+8'; II-4'. Although such an arrangement, albeit rare, was known at the time, the new owner, in agreement with the restorer, wished to go back to the more traditional layout : I-8'+4'; II: 8'. The keyboards were not original and their making not in keeping with that of the Denises or Stehlin; the same was true of the jacks. In their place, keyboards and jacks copied from those of a 1677 Louis Denis (Cité de la Musique, Paris) were installed. The jacks are quilled.

As for the stringing, also of more recent date, it was restored according to Corrette's stringing table (18th century). The instrument's tuning is around 392Hz, which is what it must have been at the time, if we take into account the length of the vibrating part of the C3 string. The period pegs are in their emplacement, originally chromatic, as are the leather-covered registers and guides.

In addition to the beauty of its sound, this 1658 Louis Denis instrument is of exceptional organological interest as it is doubtless one of the oldest French harpsichords – if not the oldest – to have come down to us with all the 'sound' elements of the case in their original state : ribs, soundboard, nuts, bridges, wrestplank and bottom.

The instrument is built in Flemish style, i.e., the bottom is removable, nailed to the case once the whole instrument was finished ; it is therefore possible to easily reach the interior, this being impossible with an Italian-made harpsichord, for example. Bridges and nuts, in walnut, are in the Italian style and have never been moved or lengthened ; the large bridge ends without a 'scroll', like the 1677 Louis Denis.

François Badoud

Translated by John Tyler Tuttle

Sources : R. von Nagel; J.-P Brosse; A. de Andrès

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