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BLAVET  
BOISMORTIER  
BRAUN  
F. COUPERIN  
D'ANGLEBERT  
HOTTETERRE  
MONTÉCLAIR  
P.D. PHILIDOR  
VISÉE

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# French Baroque Flute Edition

If we are to clearly distinguish the modern flute from its precursor, the recorder, we need some historical knowledge of the diverse terminology used for these different instruments. Around the 1720s the modern flute superseded the recorder in popularity. Before this development the recorder, an instrument which came in various sizes and pitches, was regarded as a kind of flute and accordingly was known by various terms, including *flûte à bec*, *Blockflöte*, *flauto diritto* and *flauto dolce*. The modern flute, which has been in use for 300 years, was originally known as the *flauto traverso* (traverse or sideways flute). In spite of the greatest efforts of musicologists, the varying terminology used at that time may still seem confusing to us. For instance, Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No.4 in G major is scored for 'fiauti d'écho', which all available evidence suggests were recorders. Scholars have concluded that generally, when indicated in the original source, the term 'flauto' (with no adjective) would have implied the recorder. Both Bach and Handel composed for the recorder, but Telemann left a greater quantity of fine music for the instrument in many different contexts and combinations. Among French composers Michel Blavet, Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (who wrote six concertos for five flutes!) and Jacques-Martin Hotteterre stand out, while there are several other lesser figures who made important contributions to the flute repertoire.

The heyday of the recorder family, whose chief members were soprano, alto, tenor and bass, was the early 18th century before its gradual replacement by the flauto traverso. Nevertheless, in spite of this progress, many composers did continue to write for the older instrument.

While the modern flute is still used as a substitute for the recorder in many concerts of music from the baroque period and earlier, there is now a greater awareness of early performance practice and a keener understanding of its benefits. Thus the pure tonal quality of the recorder, almost entirely free from overtones (or high harmonics), seems a much more desirable option than formerly. Conversely, the widespread enthusiasm for early instruments has led to the substitution of the recorder for the originally intended flute on many occasions.

**François Couperin (1668–1733)**, often known as 'Couperin le Grand' to distinguish him from other members of a musical family, lived in Paris from birth to death. Both his uncle Louis and his father Charles had held the position of organist of St Gervais. He probably received his first music lessons from his father before he in turn inherited the same organist's post. At the height of his career, Couperin was considered the pre-eminent teacher of harpsichord and organ. In 1693, he succeeded the organist Jacques-Denis Thomelin (his former teacher and father-figure) at the court of Louis XIV.

Two genres in which Couperin excelled were the *ordre* and the *concert*, both equivalent to the suite and each consisting of a sequence of short pieces. With typical individuality, Couperin preferred the term *ordre* to *suite*. Couperin composed around 240 short pieces for harpsichord, as well as a quantity of chamber music. He contributed significantly to the integration and combination of the French and Italian styles. His collection *Les Nations* ('Sonades et suites de simphonies en trio' [sic], published in 1726) includes *L'Impériale*, a later, more mature work than many of the Ordres.

Couperin's Concerts (including four Concerts Royaux and ten more collectively entitled *Les Goûts-réunis*) were scored for solo harpsichord or, as the textures and other references to the original performers suggest, for ensemble. Such freedom of instrumentation is also found in the works of his contemporaries. The movements include the traditional French dance-forms such as allemande, courante, sarabande, gavotte and menuet, but also less common types including forlane and rigaudon. More individual movements have titles such as *Plainte*, *Musète dans le goût de Carillon* and *La Tromba: Légèrement*. In Concert No.4, Couperin juxtaposes courantes in the French and Italian styles. It is perhaps difficult to understand in these multi-cultural times, but in the 18th century an animated debate about the opposing merits of the French and Italian styles was sustained.

Towards the end of his life (in 1724), Couperin composed two musical tributes or apotheoses, one to Lully and the other to Corelli. In the trio sonata *Le Parnasse, ou L'Apothéose de Corelli* he acknowledges his debt to the Italian master while blending the finest characteristics of both Italian and French styles. Each of the seven movements has an evocative title – as in 'Corelli at the foot of Parnassus asks the Muses to welcome him among them', '... charmed by his good reception ...' 'drinking at the waters of Hypocrene', 'after drinking ... Corelli falls asleep', etc.

Originally scored for two violins and continuo, this trio sonata is equally effective when performed with flutes. Couperin was generally not specific about the scoring of his chamber compositions, suggesting optional alternatives such as violin, flute, oboe, viol and bassoon.

'Le Rossignol-en-Amour' is a gentle piece extracted from Couperin's Ordre XIV. The composer wrote: 'This Rossignol may be performed with the greatest possible success on the flute.' During the second half of the 20th century and in the early 21st century, there has been a tremendous revival of interest in baroque music, together with the use of period instruments and a more historically informed style of performance. This is not to say, however, that the passion for earlier periods of music did not exist previously. Many composers and musicians have devoted themselves to the study of not merely Bach and Handel, but also figures such as Rameau, Couperin and Lully. For instance,

in the late 19th century Brahms performed music by Couperin in his piano recitals and contributed to the first complete edition of his harpsichord pieces.

**Robert de Visée (c.1655–1732/3)** was a lutenist, guitarist, theorbist and viol player at the courts of Kings Louis XIV and XV. Biographical information regarding his early life is inadequate, but it is known that he performed as a court musician to Louis XIV from the age of 25. He did not receive an official position until 1709, when he was appointed as a singer to the Royal Chamber. He performed at court with other distinguished musicians of his day such as the virtuoso gamba player Antoine Forqueray. By the mid-1680s he had become one of Louis XIV's favourite musicians. From 1695, he gave the king instruction in the guitar. As he is recognised today as probably the most important French baroque composer for the guitar, he is best known for his music for that instrument. Visée's *Pièces de théorbe et de luth* (1716) may be performed as ensemble pieces, as recorded here. Again the composer did not always specify which particular instrument should take the highest part. The other suites recorded here include one in G minor from the above-mentioned collection of 1716, and a Suite in D major from 30 years earlier, dedicated 'Au Roy' (Louis XIV).

**Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689–1755)** was born in Thionville (Lorraine) but spent his late childhood and early adulthood in Metz, where he received his first music tuition. He then followed his teacher, Joseph Valette de Montigny, to Perpignan, before settling in Paris around 1723. He studied both the flute, which he favoured, and the violin. His copious output of compositions runs to over 100 publications, including numerous works for the flute (as well as an instruction method, now lost). He composed several theatrical works – opéra-ballets, *etc.* – secular cantatas and much chamber music. He was the first French composer to write a concerto for a solo instrument – a work scored for cello, viol or bassoon (1729). In the 18th century it was extremely rare for a composer to be able to make a living from the publication of his music, but Boismortier succeeded – even without any patronage or prestigious employment. Soon after arriving in Paris, he obtained a Royal Privilege as an engraver and began to publish his compositions. A major contribution to his success was his provision of eminently playable, undemanding and attractive music for moderately proficient performers, especially exploiting the pre-eminent popularity of the flute among amateurs across Europe. His remarkable facility – not unlike that of his contemporary Telemann – aroused envy.

Such fluency will always cause suspicion, but in Boismortier's case there is no suggestion of a drop in either quality or inventiveness. 25 years after his death, the composer and writer on music Jean-Benjamin de la Borde commented:

'Happy is he Boismortier, whose fertile quill  
Each month, without pain, conceives a new air at will.'

Boismortier published his *6 Suites Op.35 for transverse flute and continuo* in 1731. The title page states that these suites, all of which are predominantly in French style and comprise four to six movements, may be performed without continuo. Apart from the prelude (marked *lentement*) which begins each work, most of the movements are typical dances of the period – gavotte, bourée, courante, menuet, gigue, rigaudon, sarabande, *etc.* – but there are also some character pieces. The First Suite has two such movements – 'Les Charités' and 'L'Émerveillée'. The indication *gracieusement*, which Boismortier uses for several movements in the suites and sonatas recorded here, might well serve as a key word in generally describing his musical language.

In 1733, Boismortier published his *6 Sonatas for flute and continuo Op.44*. Here the composer's early advocacy of the Italian style is evident but, unlike François Couperin, he did not attempt in his compositions to integrate this influence within the French style. Each piece in this set has four movements.

Boismortier's set of *6 Sonatas Op.91* (published 1741/2) has the designation 'for harpsichord and flute', the two instruments being treated as equals. Here the independence of the harpsichord suggests the influence of Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville's *6 Sonatas Op.3* for harpsichord and violin, published about seven years previously. In common with Op.35 and Opus 44, the Op.91 set includes three pieces in minor keys. One difference in this later group of sonatas is the scarcity of dance-movements – only a sicilienne in the First Sonata and a menuet in the Sixth Sonata. Boismortier dedicated these six sonatas to Michel Blavet, the most celebrated flautist of his time.

Born in Besançon, **Michel Blavet (1700–1768)** taught himself to play many instruments, but the flute and the bassoon were of special importance to him. He would become a virtuoso on the flute, which curiously he held to the left. In his excellence of his playing he demonstrated the possibilities of an instrument which had been perfected by the Hotteterre family in the reign of Louis XIV. He probably ordered instruments to be constructed specially for his requirements or even made them himself. (Similarly the flute virtuosi and composers Jacques-Martin Hotteterre and Joachim Quantz were also instrument-makers.) Blavet had practised his father's profession of wood turning before deciding to pursue a musical career. When contemporaries spoke of his flute-playing, they particularly mentioned his exceptional intonation in the most difficult keys and his beauty of tone. After a succession of prestigious appointments, Blavet became a member of the *Musique du Roi* – i.e. Louis XV. In 1726, he participated in the newly-formed *Concert Spirituel*, playing a flute concerto. He would become the most frequent performer in music history at this concert series. Another appreciative listener described his performing style as 'exciting, exact and brilliant', while his technical command and understanding of different kinds of music were equally praised. He enhanced the instrument's popularity in France, where a merely languorous manner of performance had previously been regarded as the norm. Blavet showed how the flute was equally capable of expressing fire or passion.

As a composer, Blavet was among the first to introduce Italian elements into French music and one of the earliest French composers to contribute to the typically Italian concerto genre. His group of 6 Sonatas Op.2 (1732) was followed in 1740 by a further set published as Op.3. The Op.2 set is described as *Sonates mêlées de pièces*, suggesting a character and layout more akin to the suite. These pieces have five or six movements, some with such evocative titles as 'Les Regrêts' and 'L'Invincible', or with attached names of real or fictitious people (e.g. 'L'Henriette'). Other less common movement types are the pair of tambourins in the third sonata, the second of these and the following giga exuding the fiery quality which Blavet the performer often produced. Op.3 is generally more forward-looking in style, more virtuosic and more influenced by the Italian style. Again the format is varied – between three and five movements – and includes dances such as the gavotta, giga and 'minoretto' (*sic*) with two variations.

Also recorded here are three suites – compilations (*Recueils de pièces*) of short works by Geminiani, Couperin, Rebel, Francoeur and Blavet himself, all arranged for two flutes.

The Flute Concerto in A minor is a work of striking character including a gentle gavotte and fiery last movement.

Born in Paris, **Jacques-Martin Hotteterre (1673–1763)** became the most famous member of a family of wind-instrument makers and performers. He was primarily acclaimed for his virtuosity on the flute, but he also played the oboe, bassoon and musette. He was known as 'le Romain' on account of the period he spent in Rome early in his career. As Dayton C. Miller wrote: 'The music of the modern flute begins with this author, the most celebrated flautist of the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries. Hotteterre was Chamber Musician [Flûte de la Chambre du Roy] to the King of France, and was the first to play a transverse flute in the orchestra of the Paris Grand Opera.' Hotteterre made a significant contribution to the history of flute music, compiling more than ten collections of pieces. In 1707, he published a flute method, *Principes de la flûte traversière, ou flûte d'Allemagne, de la flûte à bec ou flûte douce, et du haut-bois*. Then twelve years later his *L'Art de préluder sur la flûte traversière* was Europe's first flute manual.

The works recorded here include Op.2 and Op.5, i.e. his *First and Second Book of Pieces for Transverse Flute and Thorough Bass*. Most of the movements in Hotteterre's *First Book* (published in 1708) have names referring to places, images, or people including celebrated pupils or admirers of the composer. One famous example of baroque flute music is the allemande from Suite No.3, entitled 'La Cascade de St Cloud', a feature of the palace of this name in the Paris suburbs.

In 1715, Hotteterre revised the three existing suites from his *First Book*, dividing the G major and E minor works differently to create a new total of five suites. As the new Suites Nos. 3 and 5 were left without preludes, the flautist here, Guillermo Peñalver, has composed one for Suite No.3, while Tony Millán has arranged an appropriate movement to begin the Suite No.5 – a section in the style of Rameau followed by material from a Couperin prelude. Of the four suites in the *Second Book* the first two comprise more movements than Suites Nos. 3 and 4. In the First Suite in G minor, the equality between flute and bass instrument is striking.

Hotteterre's Trio Sonatas Op.3 (published in 1712) are four-movement works of Corellian, sonata da camera influence, several of them including a fugal movement placed after the opening prelude. These attractive works exploit both the elegant, graceful French style and the more extrovert Italian style.

**Jean-Henri D'Anglebert (1629–1691)** was one of the pre-eminent keyboard players of his day, as reflected in his employment at the court of Louis XIV. Included in his collection of *Pièces de clavecin* (1689) are the transcriptions from Lully's operas recorded here.

Now practically forgotten, **Jean-Daniel Braun** (c.1728–1740) was in his own day a familiar figure – composer, flautist and bassoonist living in Paris. Little is known about his life, except that he may have been born in Alsace and that he became a member of the ducal orchestra in Épernon – i.e. the court of Duke Louis de Pardaillan de Gondrin. Only for the period between 1728 and 1740 is there any substantial information. At that time he was granted a Royal Privilege enabling him to print four collections of sonatas for flute and basso continuo in Paris, Opp. 1, 5 and 7 and the fourth without opus number. Braun’s expertise on two instruments is reflected in his specific indication, on many of his publications, that his pieces may be performed on either flute or bassoon. The works included here – for flute and continuo, as well as a group of sonatas for unaccompanied flute – are attractively varied in character. The unaccompanied pieces are particularly diverse – some, like the *Invention* on CD 15, track 12, a little improvisatory, while also effectively contrasting the upper and lower registers. Some of these solo pieces present the performer with considerable technical challenges, suggesting that Braun was an outstanding flautist. Apart from the many examples of familiar dance-forms such as *corrente*, *allemande*, *gavotta*, *minuetto* and *giga*, there are other imaginative movement titles such as *bizarria*, *capriccio*, *fantasia*, *lamenterole*, *etc.* Braun generally treats the flute in what was then the traditional way – as an instrument of gentle, lyrical, sometimes languorous character, without the passionate or fiery feelings often evoked by Blavet. Flautists seeking to expand their repertoire from the French Baroque can ill afford to ignore the music of this little-known composer.

**Pierre Danican Philidor** (1681–1731) belonged to a famous musical family, of which his ancestor François-André was the most celebrated composer (also the finest chess-player of his time). Born in Paris, Pierre composed from an early age. 1697 was an important year: a *pastorale* of his was performed at court, and he inherited his father’s position as a member of the *Grands Hautbois*. By the time of his father’s death in 1708, he was a member of the *Petits Violons* in the Royal Chapel. In 1716, he became a viol-player in the *chambre du roi*, performing alongside such distinguished musicians as Marin Marais and François Couperin. Philidor’s three books of *suites*, published in 1717–18, are divided between works for two unaccompanied flutes and others for two treble instruments and continuo. Among the *suites* recorded here are several fugues, an *air en musette*, *sicilienne* and *paysanne* (all included in the *Fourth Suite*) and a fine *chaconne* to conclude the *Third Suite*.

**Michel Pignolet de Montéclair** (1667–1737) was born Michel Pignolet, subsequently adding the Montéclair – the name of a fortress in his home town of Andelot-Blancheville in north-east France. There is little information about his life, except that he held the position of *maître de la musique* to the Prince of Vaudémont, whom he followed to Italy. He played the *basse de violon* in the Paris Opéra orchestra as early as 1699. Michel Corrette wrote that Montéclair and Giuseppe Fedeli ‘were the first to play the double bass at the Paris Opéra’. He was highly regarded as an enlightened teacher, his pupils including François Couperin’s daughters. As a composer he was not especially prolific, but he contributed to nearly all the current genres, a notable exception being keyboard music. His fine cantatas are generally overlooked, while his theatrical works influenced Rameau. His imaginative use of the orchestra and awareness of its dramatic potential are equally significant.

The Concerts Nos. 1–4 recorded here (‘concert’ is more appropriate than ‘concerto’ to describe what is effectively a multi-movement suite) include many movements with descriptive (though not always very significant) titles such as – from Concert No.1 – ‘*Les Tourterelles*’, ‘*La Genoise*’, the lively *passepied* ‘*Le Breton*’, the *badine* ‘*L’Auvergnate*’, as well as ‘*La Florentine*’, ‘*La Milanoise*’ and the *rondeau* ‘*La Venitienne*’. The seventh movement of the First Concert, ‘*Sommeil des Festes de l’Eté*’, is more typical of the restful quality primarily, and conventionally, associated with the flute up to this time.

**Philip Borg-Wheeler**

Cover: Portrait presumed to be of Michel Blavet by Henri Millot (*d.1756*)

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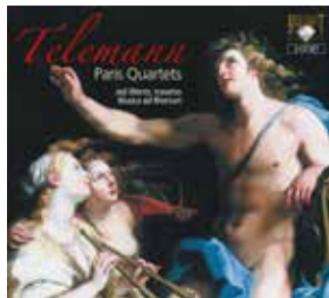
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