

Corrette, Michel (1707-1795): Overview of Writings

Michel Corrette's only known texts are essentially found in his many instrumental methods, but his scores also sometimes contain interesting indications. Today thirteen of his methods survive (two for the violin, and others for flute, violincello, *par-dessus de viole*, harpsichord, two volumes on accompaniment, a method for guitar in two volumes, and still other manuals for solfège, mandolin, cittern, double bass, and hurdy-gurdy). Four others have been lost (harp, oboe and bassoon, *quinte* or viola, clarinet, and recorder).

This body of work began in 1738 with the violin method, *L'École d'Orphée*, a volume which indicates that Corrette—who had arrived from Rouen in Paris in 1720—had managed to take an active role in Parisian musical life as a composer and organist for the Temple de Paris. He first became known to audiences in December 1732 for a concerto on Christmas carols (*noels*) for hurdy-gurdy and musette which was played in the hall of the Concert Spirituel at the Tuileries palace. The publication of his first method indicates that he had students, but it also implies that he possessed sufficient authority to respond to a question then nagging many of the period's music-lovers, faced as they were with the growing Italian influence on French musical life. How, following the example of the "*goûts réunis*" encouraged by François Couperin, was one to play the violin? Corrette describes the two co-existing manners (French and Italian) in a time when the partisans of both schools were struggling for preeminence. The question was one debated throughout Paris, to the point that it soon spawned the celebrated "*querelle des Bouffons*" (1752-1754). Still, his manual makes it understood that Corrette's tastes leaned toward the Italian. (Quite often a new work by Corrette would be motivated by events in Parisian musical life.)

Corrette's methods sold well; many were re-edited (often with substantial additions), surely due to their intrinsic qualities. Their organization is always clear, with the first chapters recalling the basics of musical notation, a section he always calls "*principes*". (These principles disappear from the methods after 1758 when he published *Le parfait maître à chanter*, which served as a method for *solfège*—both singing and music notation.) Following the principles, there generally comes a description of the instrument, followed by a series of lessons of increasing difficulty which are always explained through illustrated examples and sometimes even musical works.

The date of these methods and the instruments they address give an idea of evolving musical practices over the course of the century as well as the readers Corrette sought to reach. This is clear when one compares the two manuals for violin. The first, from 1738 compares the French and Italian styles of playing and is

intended for beginners; the second, of 1782 (*L'art de se perfectionner dans le violon*) is meant for experienced violinists and is a compilation of difficult excerpts drawn from the works of well-known authors, mainly Italians, with suggested fingerings and bowings from Corrette. His final method, for hurdy-gurdy, was published in 1783.

It should be remembered that by the mid-eighteenth century, musical pursuits were not reserved to professionals. Many music lovers from the wealthy classes, the bourgeoisie and cultivated circles (philosophers, for example) wanted to learn about music. Ever inventive, Corrette promoted a new instrument in his *Méthode de Contrebasse* (1773), calling it the "*viole d'Orphée*" built from the viols that had fallen out of use with the rise of the cello [violincello]. Michel Corrette's pedagogical works gather in a near-encyclopedic manner the knowledge of instrumental technique of his time, an enterprise that would fade with the evolution of taste and the invention of new instruments and techniques for instrument-making. It fell on the teachers of the future Conservatoire de Musique (founded in 1795) to write a new, up-to-date collection of instrumental methods.

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