

The French Connection: French influences on English music in
Restoration England

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The Restoration of Charles II to the English throne also meant the return of music for the court. While many musicians returned to their former positions, Charles II had very different musical tastes from his father, and took this opportunity to remake his musical establishment in the style that he preferred. During his exile Charles had spent much time at the French court and seemed determined to incorporate French ideas into his music, even going so far as to send favored musicians overseas to study with their Continental counterparts and hiring French musicians for his chapel and court. Indeed, commentators of the time readily identified Charles's preferences, noting that the King professed an "utter detestation of Fancys" (the imitative music popular in the early 1600s) and preferred music where he could readily identify the meter – the "step tripla" being declared a particular favorite.¹ Charles' clear preference for French music then became a tool that could be used for diplomatic ends. At the same time, the promotion of French musical styles created an opportunity for French musicians to build a career in England.

Charles II's interest in French music likely originated in his French background. His mother, Henrietta Maria, was the youngest daughter of Henri IV and Marie de Medici. When the conflict between Charles I and the English Parliament flared into open war, Henrietta and her youngest children sought refuge in France, which was ruled by her nephew, Louis XIV. Here she formed a Royalist court in exile, which remained the focus of Stuart

¹ Roger North, *Memoirs of Musick*, edited by Edward F. Rimbault (London: George Bell, 1846), 103-104.

resistance to the Protectorate until Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660. The exiled court was joined by the future king between 1646-1648 and 1651-1660. While the young prince was predominantly occupied with the effort to reclaim his throne, he also developed an appreciation for French music and the musical establishment of Louis XIV. Indeed, upon his restoration, one of the first changes Charles made to his court music was the addition of a “specifically French ensemble,” comprised of a *maître de musique*, several singers, and a harpsichordist. This group of French musicians accompanied the king as part of his Private Musick and may also have been asked to provide music for the queen’s Catholic services.²

Charles’ inclinations to the French style were not confined to hiring a special group of French musicians. He also created an ensemble of 24 string players, formed in emulation of Louis XIV’s *Vingt-quatre Violons du Roi*. This French ensemble, described by James R. Anthony as “the first, formally established orchestra to be built around a group of stringed instruments” was divided into five string parts rather than the four string parts common in today’s orchestra: one first violin (*dessus*), three inner parts (the *parties de remplissage*, in the registers *haute-contre*, *taille*, *quinte*) and the low *basse de violon*.³ A second ensemble of 24 string players, known as the *Petits Violons*, was formed in 1648 to serve Louis XIV

² Peter Leech, “Music and musicians in the Catholic chapel of Catherine of Braganza, 1662-92,” *Early Music* xxix (2001), 577. The French ensemble was made up of a *maitre de musique*, singers covering the ranges bass, *basse-taille*, *haute-contre*, and *haute-taille*, and a *joeur de clavessin*. At least three of these musicians were composers as well, and *petits motets* and string trios survive in English sources. See particularly Leech, “Claude Desgranges,” *Oxford Music Online. Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/49394> and Leech, “Jean de la Vollée,” *Oxford Music Online. Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/47535>. The king also had an Italian ensemble. The fortunes of the Italian musicians at court are the subject of Margaret Mabbett, “Italian Musicians in Restoration England (1660-90),” *Music & Letters* 67 (1986): 237-247.

³ James R. Anthony, *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyleaux to Rameau*, 2nd edition (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997), 21. All four of the lower parts (*haute-contre*, *taille*, *quinte*, and *basse de violon*) were performed on viols, not violins. The double bass and cello did not become part of the French orchestra until the late 1600s.

personally.⁴ Clearly the preeminence of these two ensembles at the court and the distinction they gave to Louis XIV made a strong impression on the young Charles.

By 1661, Charles had decided that his violin ensemble needed a stronger understanding of authentic French style. This time instead of hiring French musicians, he sent an English musician to France. John Banister, who had been appointed to the 24 Violins at the end of 1660, was sent at the end of 1661 “to goe into France upon Some speciall Service & returne with all possible expedition.”⁵ According to Banister’s contemporary Anthony Wood, the trip’s purpose was “to see and learn the way of the French compositions.”⁶ Banister’s studies were apparently successful as in April 1662 he was placed in charge of a ‘Select Band’ of 12 violinists, created in imitation of the *Petits Violons*.⁷

A further refinement of the French style took place in 1666 with the appointment of Luis Grabu to the post of Master of the King’s Music, in succession to Nicholas Lanier (who had held the position under Charles I and was reappointed in 1660). Born in Spain, Grabu probably received his musical training in France. By 1667, Grabu replaced Banister within the Select Band, and he remained in that position until the passing of the Test Act in 1673. This anti-Catholic employment legislation meant that he and many other Catholic musicians at court, such as the French ensemble, had to leave their court positions.⁸ Fortunately, many of them including Grabu found employment in the field of theatrical

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Quoted in Peter Holman and David Lasocki, "Banister," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42774pg2>.

⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Information in the preceding sentences derived from: Peter Holman, "Grabu, Luis," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/11564>.

entertainment. Shortly after the passing of the Test Act, Grabu himself collaborated with another Frenchman, Robert Cambert, in launching an English opera house, the Royal Academy of Music, in imitation of the French *Académie royale de musique* in Paris. This venture proved unsuccessful, but the musicians who (according to the publicity surrounding the new enterprise) were recently arrived from France, found themselves in demand for other theatrical events, such as the 1675 court masque *Callisto*. This production, which mixed singing, dancing, and drama, featured a plentiful number of French musicians, some still employed by the court.⁹ Other performers were free-lancing, perhaps with the aim of earning a court appointment. In this group, we find the recorder player James Paisible, who along with three other French recorder players, obtained that coveted court appointment in 1677.¹⁰

The Symphony Anthem and the *Grand Motet*

By this point, the French style seemed fully entrenched at the royal court. The music for the Chapel Royal also reflected this change. Beginning in 1662, the musicians of the 24 Violins were made available to the composers of the Chapel Royal to provide preludes, interludes, and accompaniments to the usual choral singing. Noted diarist Samuel Pepys described an early performance, writing that the “violls and other instruments [played] a Symphony between every verse of the Anthem; but the Musique more full then it was the

⁹ See Andrew R. Walkling, “Masque and Politics at the Restoration Court: John Crowne’s *Calisto*,” *Early Music* xxiv (1996): 27-62, particularly pp. 33-47, where he reviews the amateur and professional performers involved in the production and classifies them by role, nationality, and position at court.

¹⁰ Paisible is listed in the performers’ list for *Calisto* (Ibid., 34). Walkling suggests that Paisible may have been employed specifically for his ability to play the French oboe and may even have appeared on stage in costume (Ibid., 46). See David Lasocki, “Paisible, James.” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20716>, for more details on Paisible’s life and career.

last Sunday, and very fine it is.”¹¹ Although the instrumental ensemble was nominally 24 players, a rotation system later limited the string players to 5 at any given service.¹²

Unfortunately, this new style did not meet with universal approbation: John Evelyn wrote of the same service: “Instead of the ancient, grave and solemn wind music accompanying the organ, was introduced a concert of 24 violins between every pause after the French fantastical light way, better suiting a tavern, or a playhouse, than a church.”¹³

Despite these objections, the symphony anthem became an important genre of the Chapel Royal’s repertoire. While Henry Purcell’s anthem “O Sing unto the Lord” was originally composed for the 1688 coronation of Charles’s successor James II, this piece demonstrates many of the characteristics of the symphony anthem. Purcell begins with a short overture in two parts, the first stately and chordal, foreshadowing the melody of the opening phrase of text, and follows the opening with a contrapuntal second section. The anthem text is first sung by the bass soloist, accompanied by the continuo, and answered by the full chorus singing “Alleluia” in triple meter in an additive texture, as Purcell builds up his musical forces part by part from the bass to the first violin. The bass soloist returns, the alleluia is repeated, and the violins close out this section with a triple meter passage.

The scoring for the anthem continues to alternate between the soloists in various configurations, the chorus, and the orchestra. Purcell closes the work with another statement of the “Alleluia”, this time beginning with the soloists, then adding the chorus,

¹¹ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, entry for Sunday, September 14, 1662, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1662/09/> .

¹² Ian Spink, *Restoration Cathedral Music, 1660-1714*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 102.

¹³ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, entry for 21st December 1662, William Bray, editor, (New York & London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901), 366.

followed by a statement for the orchestra, and concluding with the full orchestra and chorus, making a suitably impressive end to this symphony anthem.

The symphony anthem has often been linked to a similar large-scale sacred genre in the French music, the *grand motet*. According to Abbé Perrin, the daily mass at the French royal court included both a *petit motet* and a *grand motet*.¹⁴ The *petit motet* was typically composed for one, two, or three voices with continuo while the *grand motet* was larger in nearly every musical dimension. The choir was divided into a *grand choeur* of five parts with multiple singers per part and a *petit choeur* of five soloists. The singers were joined by an orchestra, drawn from Louis XIV's *Vingt-quatre Violons*, as well as additional wind instruments. The orchestra not only accompanied the singers but as in the symphony anthem performed short instrumental pieces that preceded the full motet or separated internal sections.

The structure of the grand motet, like that of the symphony anthem, revolved around frequent changes of texture. Anchored by the full chorus and orchestra, the motet featured sections for one or more soloists often with obbligato instrumental accompaniment. The first grand motets were probably composed in the 1650s and the genre flourished in the following decades. Among the favorite motets of Louis XIV was Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Miserere*, composed in 1664. Like Purcell's "O Sing unto the Lord," Lully's *Miserere* begins with a symphony for the orchestra that previews the melodic material that is to come. Unlike Purcell's symphony, however, Lully's has only one section, in the same stately vein as the opening of "O Sing unto the Lord." The treble-bass polarity of

¹⁴ "For the King's Mass, there are ordinarily three [motets] sung: a *grand*, a *petit* for the Elevation, and a *Domine salvum fac Regem*." Abbé [Pierre] Perrin, Preface to *Cantica pro Capella Regis* (Paris: Ballard, 1665); quoted in Anthony, 217.

this piece would have been enhanced by the distribution of instruments within the *Vingt-quatre Violons*, where half the ensemble was assigned to the highest and lowest lines respectively.¹⁵

Lully makes use of imitation with the entrance of the soloists on the text “Miserere mei deus (Have mercy on me, lord).” One by one the five soloists of the *petit chœur* enter with this text.¹⁶ The *petit chœur* here is accompanied only by the continuo. Only when the full chorus enters with the same text does the orchestra enter. Lully then begins to work with texture, using the two choruses to highlight each phrase of text. He begins by having the two groups alternate singing segments of the text “Secundum magnam misericordiam tuam (According to the greatness of your mercy)” until they come together at a cadence. He further enhances the meaning of the text by linking the concept of greatness (the text *Secundum magnam*) with its performance by the larger of the two vocal groups. On the second line of the *Miserere*, “Et secundum multitudinem (And according to the multitudes)” Lully once again opens with the *petit chœur* but soon brings in the full chorus in an imitative texture that helps suggest the multitudes through the device of amplification. Gradually the two choruses are reunited with a syllabic, homorhythmic declamation of the concluding text, “dele iniquitatem meam (do away with my offences).”

Thus, unlike Purcell, Lully’s opening section makes more extensive use of a rapid alternation of the soloists and chorus. Later in the work he does compose more substantive sections for one or more soloists with obbligato instrumental accompaniment, as well as

¹⁵ The group had 6 performers on each of the *dessus* and *basse* parts, for a total of 12; the other 12 performers (making up the 24 total) were divided 4 per each of the three inner parts. See Anthony, 21.

¹⁶ The *Chapelle Royale* performers were all male, and the higher parts of both the *petit* and *grand chœur* were sung by a mixture of boy sopranos, castrati, and falsettists. A thorough overview of the various ways in which these roles were filled can be found in Anthea Smith, “Charpentier’s Music at Court: The Singers and Instrumentalists of the *Chapelle Royale*, 1663-1683 and Beyond,” in *New Perspectives on Marc-Antoine Charpentier*, Shirley Thompson, editor, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010): 133-159.

other short instrumental interludes. Overall, though, the scope and size of this *grand motet* is considerably larger than Purcell's symphony anthem.

One possible connection between these two genres can be found in the young Pellam Humfrey, one of the beneficiaries of the king's interest in French music. Humfrey was first appointed to the Chapel Royal as a chorister, but in mid-1660s, after his voice changed, he was sent to the Continent with 200 pounds of "secret service funds."¹⁷ He traveled through France and Italy, receiving another 250 pounds, and returned home in 1667. According to Pepys, this voyage turned Humfrey into 'an absolute Monsieur, [...] full of form and confidence and vanity."¹⁸ Humfrey rejoined the Chapel and became master of the children in 1672, a position he was to hold for only 2 years, as he died in 1674. While some scholars find evidence of direct French influence in Humfrey's music, others credit Humfrey's studies in Italy with forming his distinctive style.¹⁹ Despite this scholarly dispute, it seems reasonable to suppose that Humfrey's familiarity with French culture and music was transferred to his students, who included the young Henry Purcell.

Moreover, the lack of specific links between the repertoire of symphony anthem and *grand motet* does not preclude a more general connection of style and intent between the two genres. Indeed Charles II's promotion of French music through the creation of the French ensemble, his 24 violins, and the hiring and promotion of French musicians

¹⁷ Spink, 116.

¹⁸ Pepys, entry of 15 November 1667; accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1667/11/>.

¹⁹ Both Ian Spink and Peter LeHuray claim the French influence is the greater (Spink, 116; Peter LeHuray and John Harper, "Anthem: I. England 4. History c1660-c1770," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/00998>). Bruce Wood argues that Humfrey's "French" style was actually present from Humfrey's early compositions, and that more credit should be attributed to direct study of Italian models and to Italian-influenced English compositions. See Wood, "Humfrey, Pelham," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13544>.

suggests that both genres grew out of the same impulse and made use of the same materials: the glorification of both God and the king through the most magnificent music possible.

French Music and English Politics

The establishment of the French style as the preferred musical style made it possible for music to be used as a diplomatic tool, as John Buttrey argues about the career of French composer Robert Cambert, who was mentioned above as Louis XIV's collaborator in the attempt to found an English opera house.²⁰ Cambert arrived in England in 1673, after his partnership with Pierre Perrin to create the *Académie de musique* ended when their privilege to produce opera was seized by Jean-Baptiste Lully, favoured composer of Louis XIV. Nevertheless, Cambert's trip to England seems to have been supported by the French king, who arranged for the composer to enter the service of a young Frenchwoman, Louise de Queroualle. Louise began her court career in the service of Henriette, the youngest sister of Charles II and wife of Louis XIV's brother, Philippe d'Orléans. Henriette visited England in 1670 to encourage her brother to sign a secret treaty with the French, and Louise may have caught the king's eye at that time. When Henriette's death later that year left Louise with no court position, Louis XIV sponsored her return to England as a maid of honour to the English queen. By 1673, Louise had become Charles II's *maîtresse en titre*, and was given the title of Duchess of Portsmouth. She was now one of the most powerful women at the court, thanks to her access to and influence on the king. Thus, by sending Cambert to England, Louis XIV was both supporting Louise's

²⁰ John Buttrey, "New Light on Robert Cambert in London, and his *Ballet et musique*," *Early Music* xxiii (1995): 198-220. Information in the following paragraphs is derived from this article

position by providing an appropriate establishment for her, and also catering to Charles II's well-known preference for French music and musicians.

In 1676, the arrival in France of the beautiful and tempting Hortense Mazarin occasioned an intensification of musical activities around the Duchess. Hortense had previously been involved with Charles, and her reappearance in England was a serious threat to the Duchess of Portsmouth's position, and consequently this avenue of support for Louis XIV's English policies. In June of that year, the French contingent was augmented by three singers from Louis XIV's court, who then performed at events hosted by the French ambassador and the Duchess of Portsmouth. The French ambassador, Honore Courtin, reported back to Louis about an event hosted by the Duchess that Charles "[took] the greatest pleasure in hearing [the singers]; furthermore, he wants them to repeat the Sleep Scene [from Lully's *Atys*] tomorrow, for the fourth time."²¹ Indeed, only a week later Courtin added: "the King of Great Britain has often heard [the singers] Messieurs Gillet, La Forest, and Godonesche at her apartments; they have several times sung the *sommeil* and many other scenes [...] Monsieur Cambert accompanies them on his harpsichord [...] there are five or six men who play the [recorder] very well. Your Majesty's musicians have acquired a great reputation here."²² By adding to the Duchess's musical establishment, Louis was able to help her entice the King away from Hortense and retain her position as official mistress.

Buttrey further notes that one side effect of these musical events were opportunities for the newest French music to be heard in England. Here, and likely in other places, the

²¹ Ibid., 200.

²² Ibid., 205. One of the recorder players could have been James Paisible, who is known to have performed at events sponsored by Hortense Mazarin also at this time.

King's preference for French music resulted in music from the most recent operas, such as Lully's *Atys* which had premiered in January 1676, being performed in England and English musicians being exposed to the most up-to-date French music.²³

Conclusions:

The musical activities of Charles II clearly demonstrated a preference for French music and its accoutrements. In doing so, the king provided opportunities at his court both for French musicians to make a living and for English musicians to be exposed to French styles, whether at home or abroad. Furthermore, to attempt a stylistic distinction between sacred and theatrical musical influences is somewhat fruitless. John Evelyn's criticism of the new Symphony Anthem as better suited to the theater definitely has its merits: the French grand style was indeed theatrical whether the venue was the chapel at Versailles or the opera house. But in the end, increasing public resistance to Catholicism, as seen in the Test Act, culminated in the removal of James II, a professed Catholic, from the throne in 1689, and contributed to the decreased influence of French music in the ensuing decades. Ironically, the fad for French music was replaced by an equally passionate infatuation with the just-as-Catholic Italian style, but in true English fashion, the Italian style was championed by a German – George Frederic Handel.

²³ Ibid., 209.

Chronology

- 1660 Restoration of Charles II; John Banister appointed to court
- 1661 Banister sent to France
- 1662 Banister returns; Select Band created and Banister placed in charge; 24 Violins begin to perform with Chapel Royal
- 1664 Lully composes *Miserere*; Pellam Humfrey sent to continent around this time
- 1666 Luis Grabu appointed Master of the King's Music
- 1667 Grabu replaces Banister as leader of Select Band; Humfrey returns from abroad
- 1670 Henriette marries Philippe d'Orléans; visits England; death of Henriette; Louise de Queroualle travels to England
- 1672 Humfrey appointed Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, including Purcell
- 1673 Test Act; many Catholics resign their positions at court; Robert Cambert and James Paisible arrive in England; Louise de Queroualle becomes Duchess of Portsmouth
- 1674 Humfrey dies: Cambert and Grabu try to establish a Royal Academy of Music
- 1675 rehearsals and performance of *Calisto*
- 1676 Hortense Mazarin arrives in England and attempts to replace Louise as *maitresse en titre*; additional French singers arrive in England and perform material from the most recent French operas
- 1677 Paisible appointed to court
- 1688 Purcell composes "O Sing unto the Lord"; James II crowned
- 1689 the Glorious Revolution; James II dethroned and William and Mary installed as King and Queen

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