

Choral Reviews

John C. Hughes, editor

Rameau Grand Motets

In convertendo (c. 1711)

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764)

Edited by Jean-Paul C. Montagnier (b. 1965)

ST[haute-contre]BarB: Solos

SST[haute-contre]TBarB: Chorus

2 Flutes, 3 Oboes, 2 Violins, 2 Violas, Bass,
Bassoon, Basso Continuo

(c. 26')

Seven Movements: I: Récit de haute-contre;
II: Chœur; III: Duo de dessus et basse; IV: Récit
de basse-taille; V: Chœur dialogué; VI: Trio de
dessus, haute-contre et basse; VII: Chœur

Text: Latin: Psalm 125 and Psalm 68, verse 35

Carus-Verlag (21.008)

ISBN: 9790007142155

Quam dilecta tabernacula

Rameau

Ed. Montagnier

SST[haute-contre]BarB: Solos

ST[haute-contre]TBarB: Chorus

2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Violins, 2 Violas, Bass,
Bassoon, Basso Continuo

(c. 20')

Seven Movements: I: Récit de Dessus; II: Chœur;
III: Récit de haute-contre; IV: Trio de deux
dessus et basse; V: Récit de taille et chœur; VI:
Récit de basse-taille; VII: Chœur

Text: Latin: Psalm 83 verses 1–5, 8, 9, 13

Carus-Verlag (21.006)

ISBN: 9790007142162

Deus noster refugium

Rameau

Ed. Montagnier

SST[haute-contre]TTB: Solos

ST[haute-contre]TB

2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Violins, 2 Violas, Bass,
Bassoon, Basso Continuo

(c. 26')

Eleven Movements: I: Récit de haute-contre; II:
Trio de deux dessus et basse; III: Chœur; IV:
Récit de dessus; V: Récit de basse; VI: Quatuor
pour haute-contre, deux tailles et basse; VII:
Chœur; VIII: Récit de haute-contre; IX: Duo de
taille et basse; X: Récit (missing vocal part);
XI: Chœur (repeat of movement XII)

Text: Latin: Psalm 45

Carus-Verlag (21.007)

ISBN: 9790007142179

The *grand motets* of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) represent a unique contribution to this genre's evolution. Through dramatic instrumental writing and vocal virtuosity, these compositions fuse the operatic sensibilities of Rameau's secular works with the sacred conventions of French Baroque motets. In fact, Rameau's motets, along with the more celebrated *grands motets* of Jean-Joseph de Mondonville (1711–1772), mark the end of a genre whose function was less sacred and more political propaganda.¹

¹ Jean-Paul C. Montagnier, "French grands motets and their use at Chapelle Royale from Louis XIV to Louis XVI," *The Musical Times* 146, no. 1891 (Summer 2005): 57.

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Given the popularity of *grand motets* in 16th and 17th-century France, it is surprising that only three are extant from Rameau's oeuvre. *In convertendo*, *Deus noster refugium*, and *Quam dilecta tabernacula* are all that survive from a composer who spent at least 26 years as an organist. Rameau's sacred output is remarkably small given his employment at numerous cathedrals: including Cathedral of Notre Dame des Doms in Avignon, Collège Louis-le-Grand (Jesuit College) in Paris, Notre Dame in Dijon, and Clermont Cathedral in Lyon.² Nonetheless, Rameau's *grands motets* occupy a significant place within this genre's history.

Despite their stature, access to critical editions of these works has been limited. Prior to 2004/2005, the only modern transcriptions of Rameau's three motets were in *Jean-Philippe Rameau: Oeuvres complètes*, edited by Charles Malherbe, and later published separately by Durand, edited by Camille Saint-Saëns.³ These editions, while lauded for their pioneering contribution to Rameau scholarship, are a product of their time and aesthetics. As expected, they represent the performing and scholarly conventions of an earlier time, much like the early work of the *Bach-Gesellschaft*. Liberties were taken regarding instrument designation and, moreover, important performance practice concepts germane to the French Baroque were not included.

While issues of performance practice may not be necessary within a composer's thematic catalog, their absence does make it difficult for modern performers to faithfully realize their works. Thankfully, Carus-Verlag helped bridge this gap between theoretical presentation and real-world application when they published Rameau's three

grands motets in 2004 and 2005. These scores, edited by the accomplished French musicologist Jean-Paul C. Montagnier, are scholarly editions usable for musicians unfamiliar with French Baroque conventions.

In convertendo

Of the three motets, more documentation exists regarding *In convertendo's* genesis and performance history than the others. *In convertendo* was sung at least twice at the Concert-Spirituel in Paris (30 March and 5 April 1751) and its performances were documented in *Mercure de France* (May 1751). Interestingly, this source aids in estimating *In convertendo's* composition date, wherein the author stated that this "old motet [was] written nearly forty years ago." Thus, *In convertendo* was composed around 1711. Additional records from these performances, as reported in *Correspondance littéraire* (April 1751), document the changing tastes of French audiences. These sources state that *In convertendo* was ill-received and considered antiquated, especially compared to the galante styles of Mondonville's motets, which were also presented at the same concert.⁴

While documentation of *In convertendo's* genesis and reception exists, only four musical sources are extant: the autograph manuscript, two later prints from c. 1777–1778, and a set of performing parts. Given the time span between the autograph and the two remaining sources—printed after Rameau's death—it should be no surprise that the later sources differ significantly from the autograph.⁵ These differences are most likely a

² Thomas Christensen and Graham Sadler, "Rameau, Jean-Philippe," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root, accessed July 26, 2021, www.oxfordmusiconline.com

³ Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Tome IV, Motets: In convertendo, Quam dilecta tabernacula tua*, ed. Charles Malherbe, vol. 4 of *Jean-Philippe Rameau: Oeuvres complètes*, ed. C. Saint-Saëns and others (Paris, 1895–1924).

⁴ Jean-Paul C. Montagnier, forward to *In convertendo*, by Jean Philippe Rameau, ed. Jean-Paul C. Montagnier (Stuttgart, Germany: Carus-Verlag, 2005), 9–10.

⁵ *Signatur Vm 248* (autograph manuscript), *Signatur Vm 507* and *508* (scores from 1777–1778), and *Signatur Vm 509* (performing parts) *Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris*. Further information regarding these sources is found in Sylvie Bouissou, Denis Herlin, and Pascal Denécheau, *Jean-Philippe Rameau. Catalogue*

result of changing aesthetics in late 18th-century France and, as stated by Montagnier, “do not transmit the original state of the work...notably in terms of the instrumental texture, which has nothing in common with the practice of the years between 1710 and 1730.”⁶ The Carus-Verlag edition presents a score that closely resembles the autograph manuscript while resorting to the later sources to correct errors in the autograph. It does not include the numerous alterations and re-orchestrations of the secondary sources.

In convertendo, like his remaining motets, is an effective merging of Rameau’s operatic proclivities within a sacred genre. Its structure closely resembles that of Lalande, who’s *grands motets* were revered in Baroque France, with seven independent movements for a variety of solo combinations (recitative, duet, trio, etc.) and chorus. Its text is the entirety of Psalm 125 and Psalm 68, verse 35 (fifth movement). While many movements exhibit Rameau’s polyphonic mastery—movement 2, “Tunc repletum est gaudio,” and movement 7, “Euntes ibant et flebant,”—Rameau’s dramatic flair is seen in the theatrical passages of movement 4, “Récit de basse-taille.” In addition, movement 1, as identified by Montagnier, “evokes the air ‘Coulez, mes pleurs,’ from *Zaïs*...or ‘Fatal Amour’ from the opening scene of Rameau’s *Pygmalion*.”⁷

Quam dilecta tabernacula and Deu noster refugium

Unlike *In convertendo*, the creation of Rameau’s remaining motets and their performance history are not as well documented. It is assumed that they were composed a few years

after *In convertendo*, between 1713 and 1715 when Rameau was in Lyon. Also, unlike the aforementioned work, autograph manuscripts of *Quam dilecta tabernacula* and *Deus noster refugium* are not extant. The two remaining sources for these motets are from c. 1777–1778 and, as with the secondary sources of *In convertendo*, represent a late 18th-century adaptation of Rameau’s motets rather than the original composition.

Through scholarly examinations of the later sources, Montagnier was able to determine that the copyist was working from a lost score, possibly an autograph. Montagnier concluded that much of the adaptations were within the orchestra texture. Many of the inner, viola parts were reduced to a single taille using the mezzo-soprano clef. This, and other amendments, resulted in, as stated by Montagnier, “a reinforcement of the high pitches...”⁸ In both *Quam dilecta tabernacula* and *Deus noster refugium*, the editor restores each motet to a form more closely associated with what was performed in Lyon at the time of its genesis.

Again, *Quam dilecta tabernacula* and *Deus noster refugium* illustrate Rameau’s mastery of dramatic effects within a sacred genre, and follow Lalande’s established individual movement structure. Elements of polyphonic, fugal proficiency occur in the first movement of *Quam dilecta tabernacula*, and movement three, six, and seven of *Deus noster refugium*. Theatrical flourishes are found in movement 3 of *Quam dilecta tabernacula*, and movement 2 and 9 of *Deus noster refugium*. For *Quam dilecta tabernacula*, Rameau selected various verses of Psalm 83 (1–5, 8, 9, and 13) while *Deus noster refugium* is a complete setting of the highly dramatic Psalm 45, which lent itself well to the operatic styles of Rameau.⁹

thématique des oeuvres musicales. Tom 1. Musique, instrumentale, musique vocale religieuse et profane, Paris (CMRS Edotopms. Bibliothèque nationale de France) 2007. 131–137.

⁶ Montagnier, 9–10.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Except for highly specialized performing groups (i.e. Boston Baroque, Les Arts Florissants, La Chapelle Royale), Rameau's *grands motets* are woefully underperformed, especially in the United States. This absence is due, partly, to the unfamiliarity of the musical tropes and peculiarities of this period. The complexity of French Baroque ornamentation, the uniqueness of rhythmic alterations (i.e. *notes inégales*), and the range limitations of particular instruments and voices (i.e. *haute-contre*) often give conductors pause.

Carus-Verlag's edition and Montagnier's scholarly contributions are highly commendable and appreciated as they provide musicians with the materials needed to bring Rameau's *grands motets* to a modern audience. Many of the aforementioned peculiarities are addressed in the exhaustive forward, such as the size and nature of performing groups, continuo group instrumentation, and pronunciation.

However, other issues of performance practice receive cursory attention. For many, the trademark ornamentation of the French Baroque, which was second nature to early French musicians, is still a mystery today. Montagnier improved upon Malherbe's edition by faithfully labeling all instances of ornamentation as indicated by Rameau; Malherbe only identified ornamentation with either a (tr.) or (♣) whereas Montagnier labels instances where Rameau specifically inserts a (+), (tr.), and (♣).

The editions presume that musicians are well-informed on this practice. While it may be too exhaustive and beyond the scope of any edition to provide options for all ornaments, providing musicians with primary sources, along with reputable secondary sources that compile the primary sources, would empower performers

with the information needed to approach appropriate ornamentation with confidence.¹⁰

Another confounding challenge with performing Rameau's *grands motets* is the *haute-contre*; the enigmatic vocal designation unique to the French Baroque. Although referring to a high male voice that is comparable to the contralto range, this voice designation, according to eighteenth-century treatises, was not a countertenor as the *haute-contre* carried a fuller voice in the upper register without using falsetto (*fausset*).¹¹ While the *haute-contre* is no longer cultivated, finding a suitable replacement is complicated. Within the choral texture, conductors may choose to assign this line to the altos—which due to its low range would present other problems—or divide the part between select tenors and altos depending on the tessitura. However, the latter solution would not work within the solo *haute-contre* movements. A few comments in the forward on how to approach this challenge would aid performers who are unfamiliar with this voice classification.

One could argue that these discussions may be beyond the scope of scholarly editions, especially when our current understanding of historically informed practice continues to evolve. Nevertheless, in order to ensure Rameau's *grands motets* receive the attention they certainly deserve, an edition should empower the performer with tools, or sources, necessary to tackle many of the obstacles that intimidate modern musicians not versed in the idiosyncrasies of the French Baroque.

¹⁰ For primary sources, see Jean Antoine Bérard, *L'Art du Chant* (1755); François-Joseph Lécuyer, *Principes de l'art du chant, suivant les règles de la langue et de la prosodie française* (Paris, 1769); Raparlier, *Principes de Musique, les agréments du chant, et un essai sur la Prononciation, l'Articulation et la Prosodie de la langue française* (1772); Alexandre de Villeneuve, *Nouvelle méthode très courte et très facile avec un nombre de leçons assez suffisant pour apprendre la musique et les agréments du chant* (Paris, 1733): For secondary sources see Anthony Reeves, "Ornamentation and French Baroque Choral Music," *Choral Journal* 46/6 (2005), 67-75; Dennis Shrock, *Performance Practices in the Baroque ERA Related by Primary Sources* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2013).

¹¹ Christensen and Sadler, "Rameau, Jean-Philippe."

Montagnier's edition of Rameau's three extant motets are a much-needed gift to musicians, an improvement on Malherbe's and Saint-Saëns's pioneering work, and a crucial addition to modern research on one of France's most celebrated composers. Through insightful knowledge of stylistic practice and compositional expectations of that era, Montagnier created three scores that

restore Rameau's *grand motets* to an original state that is devoid of late eighteenth-century mannerisms. Modern musicians now have reliable means to recreate the splendor of the *grands motets* at a unique point in its evolution.

— C. Michael Porter

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