

Biography of Bernard de Bury

Bernard de Bury was born in Versailles on August 20, 1720 and died there on November 19, 1785. He was born to Jean-Louis Bury, *ordinaire de la musique du roi* (“musician in the service of the King”), and Catherine-Françoise d’Hannis. Many from his musical family held court appointments. He studied music with his father, as well as with François Collin de Blamont (1690-1760), to whom he dedicated his *Premier livre de pièces de clavecin*. Bernard de Bury held various positions at the court of the king in Versailles, including that of Harpsichordist to the King of France. For that position, a distinguished lineage can be traced from Jacques-Champion Chambonnières (1601/1602-1672) to Jean-Henri D’Anglebert (1629-1691) to François Couperin to his daughter, Marguérite-Antoinette Couperin (1705-c.1778), and finally to de Bury.

Premier livre de pièces de clavecin was published c.1736. In his dedication, de Bury states that he was fifteen years old at the time the suites were written; this would place their composition in 1735 or 1736, since he would not reach his sixteenth birthday until well into the latter year. The publication was announced in the *Mercure de France* (French gazette and literary magazine published from 1672-1825 with some interruptions and under several names) in January of 1737, leading one to believe that the suites were actually published late in 1736. No known autograph of the *Premier livre* survives, and thus only the original Paris publication is available for examination.

The rest of Bernard de Bury’s career focused on music for the stage or ballet. His compositions also included various other *divertissements*, as well as sacred vocal works. De Bury received a royal pension from 1779, and in June 1785, shortly before his death in November of the same year, he was granted a title of nobility by Louis XVI.

De Bury’s accomplishments were recognized by contemporaries. Félix Raugel notes that, “In all his works, of which the *Mercure de France* said, ‘the beautiful details succeed one after another,’ he had the greatest success.”¹ Another review in the *Mercure* praised de Bury’s opéra-ballet, *Hylas et Zélis*, and held it up as an example of *le grand genre et la science de l’art* (“a great example of the skill of art”), which combined *l’essence du goût italien mariée avec un délicatesse admirable au goût français* (“the essence of Italian taste married to the delicate and admirable French taste”) in *plusieurs morceaux transcendants* (“some pieces transcendent”).² Such traits mentioned by treatise writers include arpeggiation, passage work, chromaticism, and frequent modulation. The modulations would most often be accomplished through the use of sequence, imitation, and/or circle of fifths progressions.

¹ Félix Raugel (trans. by Hans Albrecht), “Bernard de Bury,” in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 2, ed. Friedrich Blume (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1952), 498.

² Philip Weller, “Bernard de Bury,” *Grove Music Opera Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 23 April 2008), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.