

## The French Connection: Influence of François Couperin on the Music of Bernard de Bury

The first decade of the eighteenth century opened with a surge of ten harpsichord publications in France which slowed to a trickle after François Couperin issued the first of his four *Pièces de clavecin* in 1713. Perhaps due to the long shadow cast by the eminent composer, in the succeeding seventeen years ending with the issue of his *Quatrième livre* in 1730, only three contemporaries issued new works for solo harpsichord. Conversely, in the following decade of the 1730's no fewer than fourteen composers published. Among these was Bernard de Bury. We will take a few moments to examine his successful career and his current reception, as well as the publication background of the *Pièces*. Then we will investigate the French Connection – the influence of François Couperin on Bernard de Bury.

Bernard de Bury was born in Versailles in 1720 and died there in 1785. He held various posts at the court in Versailles, including that of Harpsichordist to the King of France. For that title, a distinguished lineage can be traced from Jacques-Champion de Chambonnières to Jean Henri D'Anglebert to François Couperin to his daughter, Marguérite-Antoinette Couperin, and finally to de Bury.

The composer's accomplishments were recognized by his contemporaries. Félix Raugel notes in *Die Music in Geshichte und Gegenwart* that, "In all his works, of which the *Mercure de France* said, 'the beautiful details succeed one after another,' he had the greatest success."<sup>1</sup> Another review in the *Mercur]* praised one of de Bury's opéra-ballets and held it up as an example of *le grand genre et la science de l'art* ("the ultimate in this genre and the science of art"), which combined *l'essence du gout italien mariée avec une délicatesse admirable au goût français* ("the essence of Italian taste married with an admirable delicacy to the French taste").<sup>2</sup> De Bury received a royal pension from 1779, and shortly before his death he was granted a title of nobility by Louis XVI.

Why is Bernard de Bury unfamiliar to many today? I posit two possible reasons. First, as noted earlier, there was an outpouring of publications for harpsichord in France in the 1730's. Understandably, the work of a young composer among so many could be overlooked today. Second, *Premier livre de pièces de clavecin* was not only de Bury's very first publication, but also his only collection for keyboard. The rest of his distinguished career focused on music for the stage or ballet.

The *Premier livre* 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

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<sup>1</sup> Félix Raugel (trans. by Hans Albrecht), "Bernar[d] de[diu] Bury," in *Die Musik in Geshichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 2, ed. Friedrich Blume (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1952), 498.

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

1735 or 1736, since he would not reach his sixteenth birthday until well into the latter year. No known autograph of the *Premier livre* survives, and thus only the original Paris publication is available for examination.

A French Connection between François Couperin and de Bury might be anticipated. A towering figure such as Couperin would be expected to impact succeeding composers, and the young de Bury was no exception. The influence of François Couperin on Bernard de Bury includes a marked increase in titled works, character pieces, and rondeaux, as well as a decrease in the number of traditional suite movements. These traits can be seen in the works of Bernard de Bury, as out of twenty-seven movements in his four suites twenty-six are titled, five are character pieces, eleven are rondeaux (including second rondeaux and *doubles*), and only ten are traditional dance movements, though not all are so named. In addition, over half the movements in the suites of Bernard de Bury share same or similar titles with those found in the Orders of François Couperin.

Couperin's interest in the union of French and Italian traits impacted de Bury. This is perhaps best expressed in the former's preface to *Les goûts-réunis* (published in 1724): "The Italian and the French styles have for a long time shared the Republic of Music in France. For myself, I have always highly regarded the things which merited esteem, without considering either composer or nation; and the first Italian sonatas which appeared in Paris more than 30 years ago, and which encouraged me to start composing some myself, to my mind wronged neither the works of M de Lully, nor those of my ancestors. . ." <sup>3</sup> Some of these Italian characteristics include use of sequence, arpeggiation, imitation, chromaticism, circle of fifths progressions, and sometimes frequent modulations. All of these elements can be found in the music of Bernard de Bury. As Edward Higginbottom points out in Grove Online, however, Couperin never "deserted the basic canons of French art: a natural and flowing melody, a richly expressive but not excessively chromatic harmony and a basic simplicity in musical design that generally avoided virtuosity, whether in performance or in composition." <sup>4</sup> These French traits, along with others such as restrained affect, tender melodies, and expressive ornamentation, are also all found in the work of Bernard de Bury. While incorporating Italian characteristics into his music, the young composer never forgot he was, after all, a Frenchman.

To sufficiently establish the French Connection, we will examine two individual movements by de Bury which seem directly inspired by Couperin, and then the entire first suite by the young composer. In *La Séduisante*, from his third suite, de Bury borrows heavily from the two rondeaux found in Couperin's *Les Amusemens* (Seventh Order), expanding the ideas into two rondeaux plus two *doubles*. De Bury makes use of the same key of G major as his older contemporary, and the rhythmic pattern in both of his rondeaux is found in the first of Couperin's: steady quarter notes in the right hand accompanied by

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<sup>3</sup> George J. Buelow, *A History of Baroque Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 199.

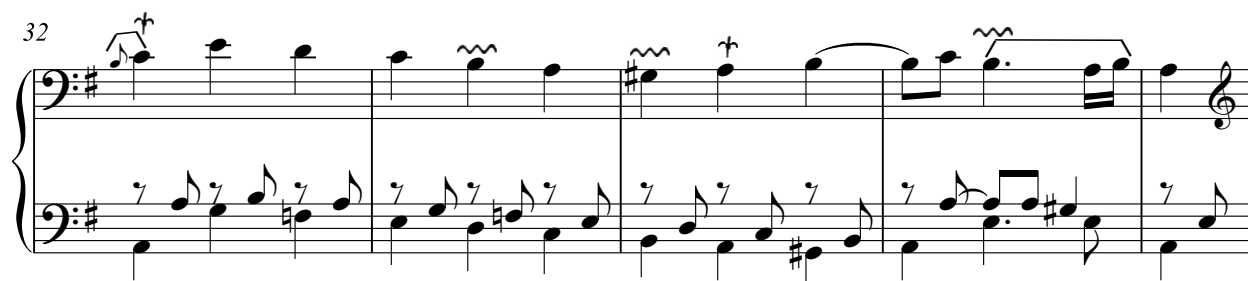
<sup>4</sup> Edward Higginbottom, "François Couperin," Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 1 February 2013), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

two broken notes for each beat in the left hand. Virtually the same descending pattern can even be found in mm. 32-36 of both.

Ex. 1a - B. de Bury, *La Séduisante 1er Rondeau* (III), mm. 32-36



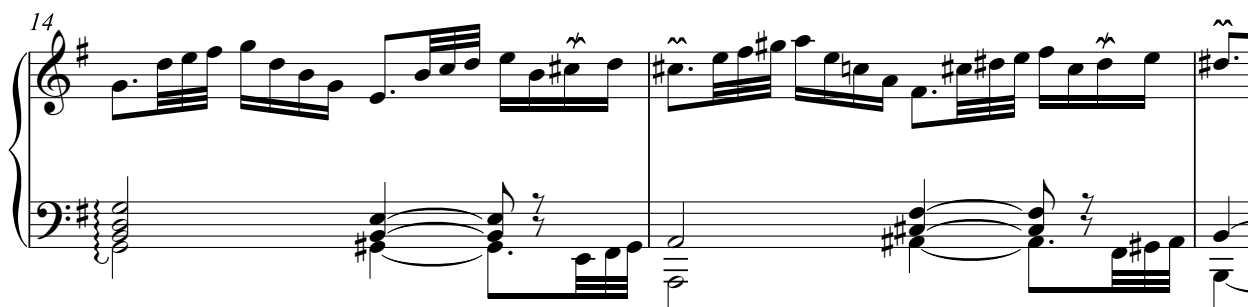
Ex. 1b - F. Couperin, *Les Amusemens* (VII), mm. 32-36 (Gilbert edition)



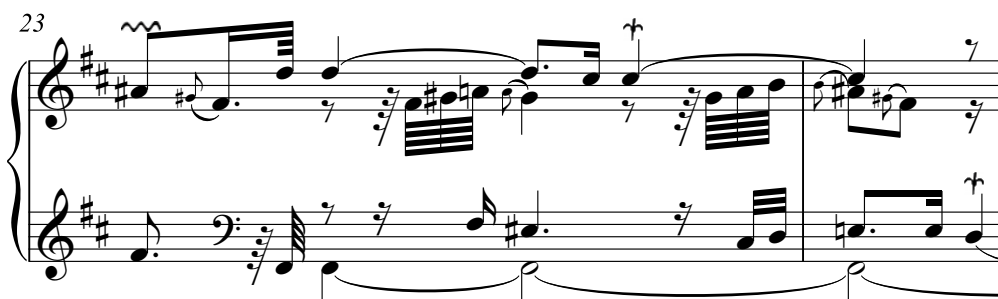
The second rondeau by Couperin moves to the minor mode, as does de Bury's second *Rondeau* with its corresponding *double*. The *doubles* are marked "three equal 16<sup>th</sup> notes for each beat" echoing the instructions in Couperin's second *Rondeau*. Couperin's *Les Amusemens* is thus the clear model for de Bury's *La Séduisante*, both of which illustrate the "natural flowing melody and basic simplicity void of virtuosity" noted earlier as being associated with French music.

*La Dampiere* in Suite IV is reminiscent of Couperin's *La Raphaële* (Eighth Order). These French allemande movements feature an upbeat figure of three rising thirty-second or sixty-fourth notes.

Ex. 2a - B. de Bury, *La Dampiere* (IV), mm. 14-16



Ex. 2b - F. Couperin, *La Raphaéle* (VIII), mm. 23-24 (Gilbert edition)



A salient point is that they are usually preceded by a dotted note or rest, which invites the use of overdotting as typically found in the French overture. De Bury subjects his three-note groupings several times to sequence. These give rise to a fair amount of chromaticism, which also reflects Couperin's *La Raphaéle*, as described by Jane Clark and Derek Connon: "This *Ordre* [the eighth] is in Couperin's *Goûts réunis* style, a style in which he sought to join the French and Italian styles in music. . . . Chromaticism, considered by the French to be an entirely Italian characteristic, is prevalent in the *Ordre*."<sup>5</sup> Thus, both composers integrate the French overture style with Italian traits such as chromaticism and even sequence, in the case of de Bury.

An exploration of the first suite by Bernard de Bury will further reinforce the connection between his work and that of François Couperin. *Première Suite* by de Bury opens with a binary form character piece called *La Minerve*, a reference to the Roman goddess of wisdom and arts. According to Clark and Connon, the Regent in Couperin's *Régente ou La Minerve* (Fourteenth Order) is Philippe d'Orléans. He was a "highly cultured man . . . [who] was liked and respected by both musicians and artists . . . Couperin's portrait is another example of his evident sympathy for the man."<sup>6</sup>

Whether or not de Bury, like Couperin, references the Regent or more generally the goddess of wisdom and arts in his *La Minerve*, he succeeds in using the opening motive in an "artful" way, as the opening gesture is imitated in the bass two measures later.

<sup>5</sup> Jane Clark and Derek Connon, *The mirror of human life': Reflections on François Couperin's Pièces de Clavecin* (UK: King's Music, 2002), 70-71.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

Ex. 3 - B. de Bury, *La Minerve* (I), mm. 1-5

This theme is then repeated in the dominant minor and subsequently imitated again in the bass. In addition to integration of the bass in this manner, later use of sequence and arpeggiated figures are musical traits that direct toward Italy, while the flowing melody and restrained affect point to France.

*Premiere Suite* continues with *Sarabande, Les Regrets*. A wistful affect in the music reflects the title of this movement. The music is simple, both in terms of the melody and the harmony. The conjunct melody decorated with numerous ornaments, sometimes in both hands simultaneously, result in a short tender French movement.

*Les graces Badines* is an unnamed gavotte divided into two *partie*, the first in A major and the second in A minor. The first *partie*, in particular, seems to emulate the title of “playful love” with its lively melody. In elucidating this designation, Jane Clark and Derek Connon quote French scholar and writer Antoine Furetière: *Il n’y a rien plus agreeable qu’un amour badin* (“There is nothing more agreeable than playful love”).<sup>7</sup> François Couperin’s *La Badine* (Fifth Order) has a similar title. This movement is marked *légèrement et flaté*.

This designation of *légèrement* (“lightly”) is also found in *Les graces Badines* by de Bury and seems to indicate an Italian style, the implication of “lightly” thus being “lightly detached”. Evidence for this comes from Couperin’s *L’art de toucher le clavecin* where, speaking about Italian music, he writes, “It is the rapid movements of the Sonatas which are the most successful on this instrument.”<sup>8</sup> The word translated as “rapid” is *légèretés* and is probably better translated as “lightly”.

Wonderfully inventive, *La Tendre Agitation* is a binary form character piece. After a first half move from A major to the key of the dominant, an unusual modulation to the major six key of F# major in the second half is followed by a run through a succession of keys (B minor, F# minor, F# major, B minor, E minor) before landing again in B minor at the halfway point. Two

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>8</sup> François Couperin, *L’art de toucher le clavecin*, ed. and trans. by Margery Halford (Sherman Oaks, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 47.

circle of fifths progressions follow, a harmonic trait of the Italians, before a return to the tonic key. The use of multiple tonalities could be the key to understanding the title referencing “tender agitation.”

In this richly expressive movement, de Bury demonstrates his inventiveness by using an idea over and over with slight variations each time. Virtually every measure has a new twist related to the opening melodic motive. This genre piece is an example of a pleasing French movement flavored with Italian traits.

Two rondeaux in the *Pièces de clavecin* by Bernard de Bury, each with an accompanying second rondeau, make reference to Cythera, the island of love, including the closing movement of the first suite, *Le Plaidoyer de Cithere*, as well as *La Citherée* from the second. François Couperin suggests the island in two works as well: *Le Carillon de Cithère* (Fourteenth Order) and *Les Pélerines* (from the Third). Clark and Connon inform us that the latter was “originally a vocal piece. The pilgrims are pilgrims of love bound for the Island of Cythera.”<sup>9</sup> The artist Jean-Antoine Watteau [1684-1721] produced two similar paintings on the subject of this island: *l’Embarquement pour Cythère* (1717) and *Le Pèlerinage a Cythère* (1721). According to Jean-antoine-watteau.org, “Although his mature paintings seem to be so many depictions of frivolous fêtes galantes, they in fact display a sober melancholy, a sense of the ultimate futility of life. . . Watteau's theatrical panache is usually tinged with a note of sympathy, wistfulness, and sadness at the transience of love and other earthly delights.”<sup>10</sup>

This background helps explain the different emotional facets of the two sets of rondeaux by de Bury referencing Cythera in their titles. Each pair has one rondeau in a major key and the other in a minor one. The differing emotions evoked could be reflecting the “sober melancholy” and “wistfulness” referenced above.

In *Le Plaidoyer de Cithere* the French Connection extends beyond Couperin *Le Grand* to include Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764), another great master of the French *clavecin* school in the eighteenth century. His three collections appeared in 1706, 1724 and 1726/1727, and thus Rameau was one of the few composers to publish works for harpsichord in France concurrent with Couperin.

The opening harmonic sequence in the first rondeau by de Bury is built on a descending chromatic tetrachord similar to that found in *Courante* of Jean-Philippe Rameau’s c.1729-30 *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin*.

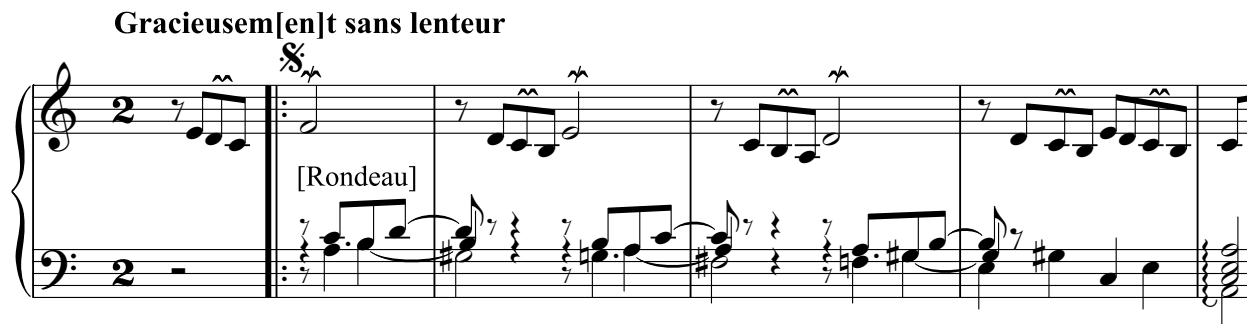
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<sup>9</sup> Clark and Connon, *Mirror*, 58.


<sup>10</sup> Jean-antoine-watteau.org

Ex. 4a - B. de Bury, *Le Plaidoyer de Cithere, 1er Rondeau (I)*, mm. 1-5

**Gracieusem[en]t sans lenteur**



Ex. 4b - J-P. Rameau, *Courante (c.1729-30 Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin)*, mm. 2-4 (Bärenreiter revised edition of 2000)



The combination of descending sequential melodic motive and sinking chromatic tetrachord tinged with sadness evokes a melancholy affect. The same motive can be heard prominently in the first two *couplets*, sometimes in inversion and in imitation. *Couplet* number three surprises the listener with Italianate running sixteenth notes throughout in the treble, which include examples of sequence. Thus, French and Italian styles are juxtaposed in this movement.

Despite borrowing ideas from the first *Rondeau, 2e Rondeau Le Plaidoyer de Cithere* by de Bury contrasts notably with it. The mode shifts from A minor to A major, and although the theme starts with the same opening motive heard in the first rondeau, it begins on the brighter third degree of the scale rather than the fifth. Though derived from the same source material, this rondeau theme has a different affect than its sister theme. Evoked are resignation and then satisfaction rather than longing and wistfulness.

The first *couplet* opens with a rising arpeggiated figure accompanied by octaves in the bass which is subsequently imitated in the bass voice, all traits a nod to the Italian style. The second *couplet* is built from the descending four-note motive, and the third reaches down to the low rich range favored by many French composers.

The French Connection between the great François Couperin and the young Bernard de Bury is clearly confirmed. Comparisons of *La Séduisante* and *La Dampiere* to similar movements by *Le Grand*, along with an examination of *Premiere Suite from Premier livre de pièces de clavecin* provide ample evidence. As Couperin sought the union of French and Italian

musical qualities, so also did his younger contemporary include both styles in his compositions. De Bury skillfully incorporated into his works Italian practices such as imitation, arpeggiation, sequence, bass octaves, circle of fifths progressions, and chromaticism with French qualities such as flowing melody, restrained affect, tender melodies, and expressive ornamentation. Sometimes the traits are juxtaposed, but more frequently they are integrated in a tasteful manner.

Though much overlooked today, a more extensive investigation of *Premier livre* reveals that this collection by Bernard de Bury is of consistently high quality. In it he achieves the musical ideal described by François Couperin when he wrote in 1725 that, “. . . the bringing together of French and Italian styles must create musical perfection,”<sup>11</sup> (*L’Apothéose de Lully*). Study of the suites of de Bury and the influence of François Couperin on them provides a more complete picture of *clavecin* music in the generation succeeding Couperin. More frequent performance of this literature will help elevate Bernard de Bury to his proper place in a long line of eminent French harpsichord composers.

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<sup>11</sup> François Couperin, *L’Apothéose composé à la mémoire de l’incomparable Monsieur de Lully*, as quoted in David Tunley, *François Couperin and ‘The Perfection of Music’* (UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, Revised Edition, 2004), ii.