

The Baroque *Offertoire* : Apotheosis of the French Organ Art

By

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Song Yi Park

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Chairperson Dr. Michael Bauer

Dr. James Higdon

Dr. Colin Roust

Dr. Bradley Osborn

Professor Jerel Hildig

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The Dissertation Committee for Song Yi Park
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chairperson Dr. Michael Bauer

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Abstract

During the French Baroque period, the function of the organ was primarily to serve the liturgy. It was an integral part of both Mass and the office of Vespers. Throughout these liturgies the organ functioned in alternation with vocal music, including Gregorian chant, choral repertoire, and fauxbourdon. The longest, most glorious organ music occurred at the time of the offertory of the Mass. The *Offertoire* was the place where French composers could develop musical ideas over a longer stretch of time and use the full resources of the French Classic *Grand jeu*, the most colorful registration on the French Baroque organ. This document will survey *Offertoire* movements by French Baroque composers. I will begin with an introductory discussion of the role of the offertory in the Mass and the *alternatim* plan in use during the French Baroque era. Following this I will look at the tonal resources of the French organ as they are incorporated into French *Offertoire* movements. Finally, I will do a comparative analysis of the stylistic characteristics of extant French *Offertoires*. I will attempt to place these selected *Offertoires* in the context of the overall stylistic development of the French classic *Offertoire*.

I will focus on *Offertoire* movements by the following composers: Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers, Nicolas Lebègue, André Raison, François Couperin, Nicolas de Grigny, and Gaspard Corrette.

During the Baroque era a distinctively French style of organ music developed for the first time. This new style was associated especially with Louis XIV, the *Sun King*, who reigned from 1643-1715. Under the reign of Louis, instrumental and choral music, opera, ballet, the visual arts, literature, and architecture all flourished at the palace of Versailles. This was also the golden age of French Baroque organ music. This literature utilized the full tonal resources of the French organ. It featured a new quality of rhythmic vitality based on dance rhythms and *notes inégales*, and transferred the rich ornamentation of French architecture, furniture, and fashion into a playful, whimsical musical language that was imitated throughout Europe. All of this was made possible because of Louis XIV's decision to devote significant financial resources to the arts.

France is a Catholic country whose liturgy has been closely connected with the organ. The organ played a prominent role in the Mass and the office liturgies, embellishing and, indeed, replacing much of the spoken word throughout this era. Settings of the Ordinary of the Mass for organ, intended for use in the context of *alternatim* practice, became one of the most important genres for French composers. Among many movements of the Mass, the longest, most glorious organ music occurred at the time of the *Offertoire* movement. The *Offertoire* was the place where French composers could develop musical ideas over a longer stretch of time and use the full resources of the French Classic *grand jeu*, the most colorful registration on the French Baroque organ. This registration emphasized the brilliance of the cornet and reed stops played together.¹

The current document will survey the extant literature of the seventeenth century French *Offertoires*, which includes works by Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers, Nicolas Lebègue, André Raison, François Couperin, Nicolas de Grigny, and Gaspard Corrette.

¹ The *cornet* is an especially crucial tonal color in French organ literature. Usually referred to as “tierce,” it is a combination of flutes 8', 4', 2 2/3', 2' and 1 3/5'.

The Organ Mass and *alternatim* practice

The organ mass is a “low” mass in which the organ alternates with chant phrases during the *Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus,* and *Agnus Dei*, as well as playing during selected movements from the Proper of the mass involving a “collection of versets for the organ replacing parts of the Ordinary and Proper of the Mass and played in alternation with the sung portions.”²

In a “high” or sung mass, *fauxbourdon* or concerted choral music would take the place of the organ. Ultimately, *alternatim* grew out of the practice of responsorial singing that had been employed for many centuries in the monastic tradition. Beginning with the publication of Nivers’ *Livre d’orgue* in 1665, a series of French Baroque composers published books containing organ masses.³

These include the following:

Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers: *Deuxieme Livre d’orgue* (1667)
Nicolas Lebègue: *Second livre d’orgue* (n.d.),
Nicolas Gigault: *Livre de musique pour l’orgue* (1685)
André Raison : *Livre d’orgue contenant cinq messes* (1688)
François Couperin : *Pièces d’orgue consistantes en deux messes* (1690)
Nicolas de Grigny: *Premier livre d’orgue* (1699)⁴

Edward Higginbottom notes,

The Ordinary of the Mass were also set in this fashion, one verse alternating with the next; and the alternation of organ with choir, or *fauxbourdon* with plainchant, rapidly gained currency during the 15th century. The introduction of the organ as a partner in *alternatim* practices led in particular to a fine body of liturgical organ music in Italy, Spain and

² Edward Higginbottom, “Organ Mass,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/20438>

³ The two earliest extant and printed organ masses appeared in Attaignant’s *Tabulature pour le jeu d’orgues* (1531), which set the pattern for printed organ masses for the next 200 years. Higginbottom, “Organ Mass.” The earliest organ music intended for *alternatim* practice occurs in the *Faenza Codex*, which dates from ca. 1420.

⁴ Higginbottom, “Organ Mass.”

France during the 16th and 17th centuries. The practice belongs almost exclusively to the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵

Alternatim performance of the mass was the prescribed method of worship throughout the Catholic Church. It flourished in France from the fifteenth century through the early twentieth century.⁶

The use of the organ was codified by the Catholic Church in documents prescribing its place in the various liturgies. Some of the best evidence for the expected role of the organist comes from ecclesiastical documents known as *ceremonials*. These documents prescribe the services at which the organist was expected to be present and the portions of each service in which the organ was to be played.

The *Ceremoniale episcoporum of 1600* was the most important early document; drafted in Rome and approved by the Pope, it governed the celebration of the liturgy throughout the Catholic world. This ceremonial was the first document to extend legitimacy to the practice of *alternatim* performance at the Mass and other liturgical offices. The *Ceremonial episcoporum* of Pope Clement authorized the use of the organ at every Sunday Mass of the year, excluding those in the penitential seasons. The ceremonial allows the organ to be played *alternatim* with the choir not only within the Ordinary, but also to replace some of the items of the Propers.⁷

Regarding its role in the Mass, the ceremonial says:

At the solemn Mass the organ is played *alternatim* for the Kyrie eleison and the Gloria in excelsis ...; likewise at the end of the Epistle and at the Offertory; for the Sanctus, *alternatim*; then more gravely and softly during the Elevation of the Most Holy

⁵ Edward Higginbottom, "Alternatim," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/00683>

⁶ Higginbottom, "Organ Mass."

⁷ It charges each individual bishop with the task of administering this practice in their own diocese.

Sacrament; for the Agnus Dei, *alternatim*, and at the verse before the post-Communion prayer; also at the end of the Mass.⁸

Since most French Baroque organ composers resided in Paris, the regulations of the Diocese of Paris were especially important. The primary document concerning the Parisian Rite was the *Ceremoniale parisiense* of 1662, which stated that the organ was permitted to be used in *alternatim* with choir during the Ordinary of the Mass, except during the *Credo*. This text prescribed the organist's function during mass in detail, including some indication of the style of the music and the precise moment when it was to be played. According to the *Ceremoniale*, the organ plays the odd-numbered verses of the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*, while the choir sings the even-numbered verses.

French organ versets and *alternatim* practice reached their zenith during the second half of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century. In addition to the Mass, *alternatim* versets are used in office liturgies, specifically in Vespers. Within the Mass, *alternatim* was employed in the aforementioned movements of the Ordinary, and in portions of the Proper, including the *Offertoire*, the *Gradual*, the *Elevation* and the *Communion*.⁹ These pieces are usually longer than the brief versets that replace a text in the Ordinary.

In the Roman rite, the liturgy of the eucharist is the central liturgical action. It begins with the preparation of the gifts and the altar. The bread and wine are prepared using prescribed prayers. The *Offertoire* was performed during this preparation time for the eucharist. This was the only moment in which the seventeenth-century French organist was allowed to develop his own musical ideas over a relatively long time span. *Offertoire* movements elaborated on the

⁸ Higginbottom, "Organ Mass."

⁹ While *Offertoire* and *elevation* movements are common, rare examples also exist of music for the *gradual* and the *communion*. John R. Shannon, *Organ Literature of the Seventeenth century: A Study of Its Styles* (The Sunbury Press, 1978), 127.

stylistic traditions employed in *grand jeu* settings in the Mass. John Shannon suggests the following stylistic features in the *grand jeu*: the French overture style, which includes dotted rhythms and roulades (scales), faster and more exciting dance rhythms, fugal use of the *basse et dessus de trompette*, echo writing and fancy technical display.¹⁰

The 17th Century French *Offertoire*

Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers (1632-1714)

Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers was a prolific composer, organist, writer and editor. Many details of Nivers' life are missing and nothing is known about his musical training. He was the organist of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, and became organist of the Chapel Royal in 1678. In 1681 he succeeded Henri Dumont as Master of the Queen's Music. Nivers wrote theoretical works, composed music for the girls school at Saint-Cyr, and edited many volumes of Gregorian chant.

Nivers' organ works were published in three prints: *Livre d'orgue contenant cent pieces de tous les tons de l'Eglise* (1665), *Second livre d'orgue contenant la Messe et les Hymnes de l'Eglise* (1667), *Troisième livre d'orgue des huit tons de l'Eglise* (1675).¹¹ Nivers' first and third organ books group the pieces together according to the eight church modes. In total, he composed one hundred pieces spanning all the church modes. None of the pieces from his first or third organ books include a Gregorian *cantus firmus*.¹²

The organ versets of his second organ book and the Thierry manuscript, named after Marguerite Thierry, a pupil of Nivers, who became the second wife of the organ builder

¹⁰ John Shannon, *The Evolution of Organ Music in the 17th Century: A Study of European Styles* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012), 92.

¹¹ James R. Anthony, *French Baroque Music, from Beaujoyeux to Rameau* (Hong Kong: Amadeus, 1997), 329.

¹² *Ibid.*, 331.

Alexandre Thierry (1647-99), are arranged for use with specific chants.¹³ Nivers' second organ book contains compositions for the Mass, a number of hymns, three sequences, and the *Te Deum*. The Thierry manuscript contains two organ Masses, versets for three hymns, and three Magnificats. The organ Masses of the Thierry manuscript have two *Offertoires*.

Nivers' organ Mass consists of five versets for the *Kyrie*, nine for the *Gloria*, an *Offerte* (*Offertoire*), three versets for the *Sanctus* (and *Benedictus*), and two for the *Agnus Dei*.¹⁴ In the preface of his *Livre d'orgue*, Nivers indicates that the pieces were to be played in alternation with the choir. He includes extensive instructions for registration, ornamentation¹⁵, hand position and fingering.¹⁶

Offerte en fugue et dialogue, 1667

This work is about three times as long, and much more complex than any other work in Nivers' first two organ books. It is the longest *grand jeu*-style movement to date.¹⁷ His *Offerte* exhibits the use of long sections involving contrasting manuals and tempos. It begins with an

¹³ The manuscript Paris Conservatoire 2094 belonged to Marguerite Thierry about 1680, who became the second wife of the organ builder Alexandre Thierry (1647-99). This collection was probably written for her by her organ teacher, Nivers. Apel, 747.

¹⁴ Nivers uses the melodies from Mass IV, *cunctipotens genitor Deus*, in the bass or in the tenor for the first movements in the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*. Most of the other movements are written freely. This is the mass setting used in virtually all French Baroque organ repertoire. Ibid., 726.

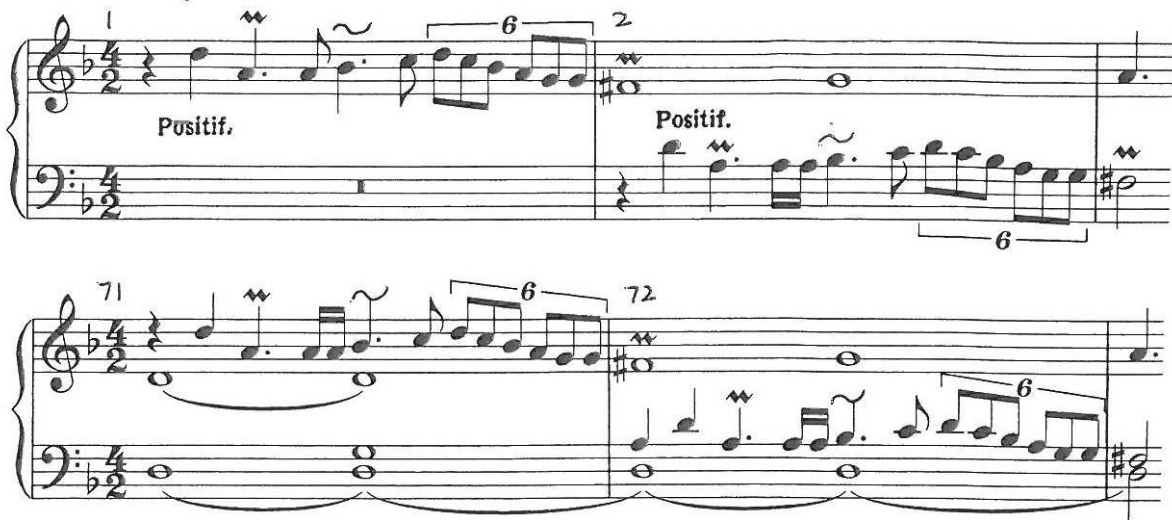
¹⁵ No earlier examples are found of this ornament:



¹⁶ Nivers gives the combinations of stops necessary for playing his works in the preface to his *Premier livre d'orgue*. This is a practice followed by most of the French organists who published after him. William H Pruitt, *The Organ Works of Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers*: (dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1969), 80.

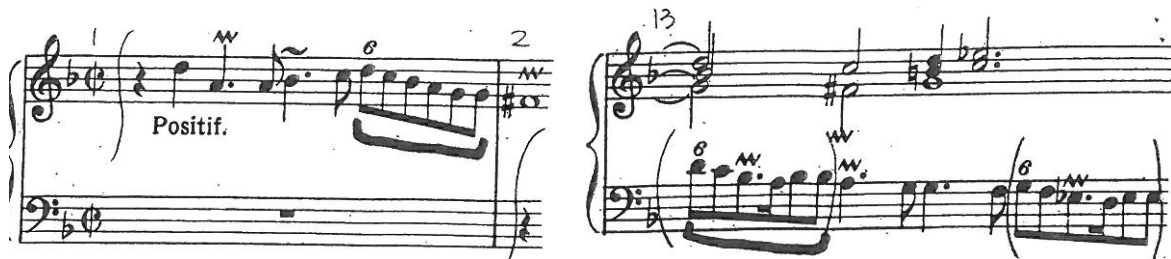
¹⁷ David Ponsford, *French Organ Music in the Reign of Louis XIV* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 278.

opening point of imitation based on a short, beautiful motive that returns at the end of the piece in a similar point of imitation (Ex. 1-1).



Ex. 1-1 : Nivers, *Offerte en fugue et dialogues*, mm. 1-2 and 71-72.

This distinctive motive employs a descending sextuplet that includes a final repeated note. Anthony says “Nivers emphasized the importance of a flowing style.”¹⁸ This flowing style is evident in the sweep of the subject itself. Nivers offered the further suggestion that the manner of playing the organ should imitate singing. As the piece continues, Nivers develops the sextuplet rhythmically and melodically in m. 13 (Ex. 1-2).



Ex. 1-2 : Nivers, *Offerte en fugue et dialogues* m. 1 and 13.

¹⁸ Anthony, 331.

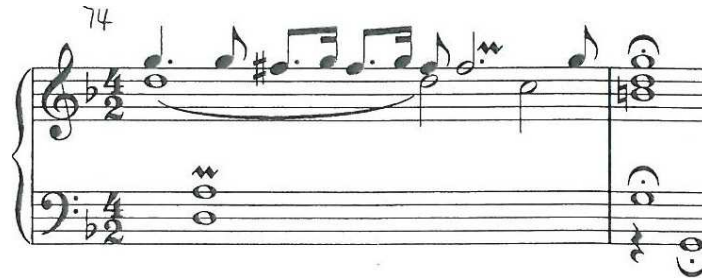
The basic form is similar to later *grand jeu* movements: a three-part form with an introduction, followed by a dialogue and a concluding section. The consistent dialogue practice between *grand orgue* and *positif* highlights the subject while avoiding any true counterpoint. Later *grand jeu* movements feature dotted rhythms and scales in the style of a French overture. Here the opening employs the subject in a point of imitation on the *positif* division leading up to its entrance on the *grand orgue* in m.16. Soon the subject begins its dialogue by appearing in the soprano (mm. 16-17), bass (mm. 23-24), and soprano again (mm. 25-26). There is a false entry in the bass voice in m.16. The pace of the entrances picks up in m. 25, with entrances occurring every two bars until he introduces a variant of the first half of the subject entering at two bar intervals in m. 32, followed by a variant of the second half of the subject in m. 33.

From measure 37 the meter is changed to triple time and Nivers employs thematic transformation of the subject (ascending and descending motion). During this dance-like section, Nivers reiterates the transformed subject over and over again. The final sequential passage from mm. 63-65 is remarkable for its sheer length and the manner in which it energizes the following material.



Ex. 1-3 : Nivers, *Offerte en fugue et dialogues*, mm. 63-65.

The last section of the *Offertoire* returns to the opening duple meter and the original motive. Ponsford points out that the compound ornament in the final cadence resembles the beginning of *Toccata prima* from Frescobaldi's *Il secondo libro di toccate* (Rome, 1627).¹⁹



Ex. 1-4 : Nivers, *Offerte en fugue et dialogues*, mm. 74.



Ex. 1-4: Frescobaldi's *Toccata prima*, mm. 1-2.

Nicolas Lebègue (1630-1702)

Little is known of Lebègue's musical education. In 1664 he became organist at the church of Saint-Merri in Paris, a position he retained until his death. He was appointed one of the four "Organistes du Roy" (organists of the king) in 1678. Lebègue was one of the most prominent

¹⁹ Ponsford, 279.

musicians during the reign of Louis XIV. His compositions show continued development of the genres and forms laid out by Nivers. Music composed by Lebègue survives in two published volumes of harpsichord music, three published volumes of organ music, four manuscripts²⁰ containing organ music, and one manuscript of harpsichord music.²¹ In his preface Lebègue states the purpose of his *Premier Livre d'orgue* and provides a general description of the work.

The music in the first book is composed of groups of pieces in each of the eight church modes. His second volume contains settings of the *Magnificat* in the eight modes of the church and a setting of the Mass. His *Troisième Livre d'orgue* contains ten *Offertoires*, four *Symphonies*, eight Elevations, nine *Noëls*, and a character piece imitating the chimes of a clock (*Les Cloches*).²² He is considered a master of *récits* and *dialogues*.²³

Offertoires :

(1er) *Offertoire en D* (2e) *Offertoire en G (sol mineur)* (3e) *Offertoire du 3e ton*
(4e) *Offertoire du 5e ton* (5e) *Autre Offertoire en C* (6e) *Offertoire en G (majeur)*
(7e) *Offertoire en fa (si majeur)* (8e) *Offertoire en C sol ut (ut mineur)*
(9e) *Offertoire en F ut fa sur le Stabat Mater* (10e) *Offertoire sur le Chant d'O filii et filiae*

Lebègue's ten *Offertoires* vary from 100 to 150 measures in length, which is generally on a bigger scale than the works in his earlier two organ books. The sheer number of *Offertoire* movements in his works makes him the most prolific composer of this genre of French Baroque organ music. Lebègue's *Offertoires* employ dialogues between full choruses or between solo voices. Dialogue is his favorite technique in the *Offertoire* movements.

²⁰ Two *Offertoires* exist in manuscripts: *Livre d'orgue de Montréal: Offertoire en F ut fa* and the *Offertoire dialogue de Monsieur Le Beigue, du 8e ton*, whose first half is located in a contemporary manuscript at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris.

²¹ First organ book: 8 groups (suite), Second organ book: versets for the Mass and the Magnificat.

²² Lebègue was one of the first French organists to write variations on noel tunes, a genre that was to become popular in eighteenth century France. Apel, 728.

²³ Anthony, 333.

Lebègue's last two *Offertoire* movements are exceptional. They are based on the Lenten hymn *Stabat Mater* and the Easter hymn *O filii et filiae*. It should be noted that ordinarily these two hymns have no place in the Mass. They are employed in office liturgies, but not in the Mass. Lebègue's decision to write *Offertoires* based on the two hymns is a fascinating mixture of liturgical forms from the Mass and Vespers. Perhaps for this reason, Lebègue does not treat them in traditional fashion with long note *cantus firmus* settings. Instead, he sets them both as theme and variation movements. The tune is paraphrased and ornamented. Variations include different ornamented versions as well as variations written in different meters and tempos.

Offertoire en F ut fa sur le Stabat Mater

The hymn *Stabat Mater* was usually sung in one of the services in passiontide (the last two weeks of Lent). The contemporary *ceremoniales* forbade the use of the organ for services during this time.²⁴ Nivers' own *antiphonarium* indicates that the *Stabat Mater* was used for processions in Lent on major feast days. The most important feast day that occurs during Lent is the feast of the Annunciation on March 25th. The *Stabat Mater* would be a perfect choice for this day.

Lebègue paraphrased the tune from the beginning (Ex. 2-1). His setting predominately consists of three-part writing. He adds voices freely to create more sonority on chords when he needs it, particularly at cadences. The tune is decorated with melodic and rhythmic ornamentation. Throughout the piece the melodic passages are punctuated periodically with homophonic phrases on the *grand jeu* that open with a short flourish.

²⁴ Marc Liberman. *The Organ Works of Nicolas Lebègue in the Context of Contemporary Theory and Practice (France)* (Northwestern University: dissertation, 1984),168.

VI
S

Tá-bat Má-ter do-lo-ró-sa Júxta Crú-cem la-
There-stood (the) Mother sorrowful. Beside (the) cross in-
crimó-sa, Dum pendé-bat Fí-li-us.

Ex. 2-1 : *Stabat Mater* tune

Ex. 2-1 : Lebègue, *Offertoire en F ut fa sur le Stabat Mater*, mm. 1-13.

Offertoire sur le Chant d'O filii et filiae

Lebègue employed two themes (an alleluia as well as a hymn tune) in this last *Offertoire*. He freely alters the themes by incorporating even more rhythmic and melodic ornamentation than he used in the previous *Stabat Mater Offertoire*. In the beginning, we can see the alleluia theme twice (m. 1-7, 8-14) employing different manuals (Ex. 2-2). Lebègue paraphrased the *o filii et filiae* tune (m. 15-32) (Ex. 2-3). In this *Offertoire*, he maintains triple meter throughout.

He changes the style substantially between sections, with different manuals employing running sixteenth note lines.

II
A

L-le-lú-ia, al-le-lú-ia, al-le-lú-ia.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

(Moderato.) 1 2 3 4 5
P.J.

6 7

Ex. 2-2 : Lebègue, *Offertoire sur le Chant d'O filii et filiae*, mm. 1-7.

I. O fi-li-i et fi-li-ae, Rex cae-lé-stis, Rex
O sons and daughters, (the) King celestial, (the) King
gló-ri-ae, Morte surré-xit hó-dí-e, al-le-lú-ia.
of-glory From-death arose today, alleluia.

15 16 17
P.J.
(s. ped.)

18 19 20 21 22 23
24 25 26 27 28 29
30 31 32
G1

Ex. 2-3 : Lebègue, *Offertoire sur le Chant d'O filii et filiae*, mm. 15-32.

André Raison (c. 1645-1719)

Very little is known about the life of André Raison. He taught Louis-Nicolas Clérambault, who dedicated his *Premier Livre d'orgue* (1710) to Raison. Raison published two *Livres d'orgues* in 1688 and 1714. He wrote and published his two *Offertes* separately; there is no *Offertoire* movement in the Mass.

The *Premier livre d'orgue* contains versets for five organ Masses, which are followed by an *Offerte du 5. Ton*. All five Masses are written freely, with no plainchant *cantus firmus*. His second organ book contains various types of small pieces such as fugues, preludes, overtures, noel variations and one *Offerte*.²⁵

His *Offerte* of 1688 was written for the entry of the king to the Hotel de Ville in Paris on January 30, 1687.²⁶ In his preface, Raison mentions that Mass movements could be substituted for *Magnificat* versets, illustrating the flexibility available to organists who owned this music. Also he includes a table of ornaments and instructions for registration and performance of the various types of pieces found in his *Livre*.

Raison is known as the leading figure in the movement to introduce dance rhythms into organ Masses. He discusses this in his prefaces. In his *Livre d'orgue* of 1688, Raison stated:

It is necessary to observe the Master of the Piece that you are to play and to consider whether it has some rapport with a Sarabande, Gigue, Gavotte, Bourré, Canarie, Passacaille, Chaconne, or the tempo of the Blacksmith dance [a characteristic dance of divertissements].²⁷

²⁵ a. Prélude sur les grands jeux ; b. Fugue (sur les petits jeux) ; c. Fugue sur les grands jeux qui se termine par un Dialogue sur « La Paix tant désirée ».

²⁶ In January 1686, the king was diagnosed as suffering from an anal fistula. Through several operations he recovered. This *Offerte* was written in honour of the occasion and for the 'happy convalescence' of the king. Ponsford, 291.

²⁷ Anthony, 335.

Offerte du 5. Ton from Livre d'orgue (1688)

At the beginning of 1688, Raison writes double dots in his music (Ex. 3-1). This is an unusual notation. There are two examples of double-dotted figuration in this piece, otherwise Raison simply writes in the usual form of dotted patterns, in the fashion of the French overture.²⁸ This opening is similar to the beginning of the *Offertoire* of Couperin's *Parish Mass*, which is also in C major and employs some of the roulades characteristic of the French overture.



Ex. 3-1: Raison, *Offerte*, mm. 1-3.

The second section starts with an imitative section in triple meter, with the tempo marking *guayment*. This *Offertoire* clearly adapts the slow-fast structure, and the characteristic styles of the overture: the regular dotted rhythm and the massive, grandiose sound in the slow section and the fast triple rhythm in the quasi-fugal section. This is primarily four-part writing but later Raison adds a duo section (mm.107-122) and trio section (mm.123-165). In the final *grand jeu* section near the end of the piece, four strains of *Vive le Roy* (“long live the king”) are

²⁸ Lully developed the form of the French overture (see *Armide*). The opening became a regal, march-like section, whose dotted military rhythms reflected the majesty of the king. George B. Stauffer, *The World of Baroque Music: New Perspectives* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 114.

incorporated into the end of the piece,²⁹ suggesting a chorus or crowd shouting in honor of the king (mm.159-end) (Ex. 3-2).³⁰

153

Vi - ve le Roy Vi - ve le Roy Vi - ve le Roy Vi - ve le

Ex. 3-2 : Raison, *Offerte*, mm. 159-162.

François Couperin [le grand] (1668-1733)³¹

François Couperin [le grand] was born in 1668 into a French musical family and was active as a composer, organist, and harpsichordist. His most recognized role at court was that of harpsichordist. Couperin published most of his works during his lifetime, beginning with his organ pieces, *Pièces d'Orgue* (1690), four harpsichord collections (1713, 1717, 1722 and 1730), a treatise on playing the harpsichord (*L'art de toucher le clavecin*, 1716, revised in 1717), chamber music collections (*Concerts royaux*, 1722; *Les goûts-réunis*, 1724; *Les Nations*, 1726), a sacred vocal music collection (*Leçons de ténèbres*, 1713 and 1717), and a secular vocal music collection (*Airs in Recueils d'airs sérieux et à boire*, 1697-1712).

The French organ school of the seventeenth century reached its highest musical level with the works of two composers, François Couperin and Nicolas de Grigny.³² Couperin wrote

²⁹ Arnold, 133.

³⁰ Ponsford, 292.

³¹ There was another François Couperin (c.1631-1708-12) who was also one of Couperin's family members. He was a keyboard player and the brother of Louis Couperin. Apel, 736.

two organ masses early in his life. The *Pieces d'orgue*, which is his only extant collection of organ music, contains these masses. The first, *Messe à l'usage ordinaire des paroisses* (*Mass for the Parishes*), is more majestic, intended for everyday use and solemn feasts in churches. The *Messe propre pour les couvents* (*Mass for the Convents*), which has no *cantus firmus* settings, is regarded as a smaller work and easier to play than the *Mass for the Parishes*. However, both masses had a liturgical function and contain the typical list of twenty-one pieces: *Kyrie* (5), *Gloria* (9), *Offertory* (1), *Sanctus-Benedictus* (3), *Agnus Dei* (2), and *Deo Gratias* (1).³³ The *Offertoires* of both masses are written on a grand scale but the *Offertoire* from the *Parish Mass* is more popular.

Offertoire sur les grands jeux from the Messe pour les paroisses (Mass for the Parishes = Parish Mass)

The *Parish Mass* may have been written for use at the church of St. Gervais in Paris.³⁴ This *Offertoire* is one of the longest compositions in the entire repertoire of French organ music.³⁵ It is divided by key into three big sections: C major (mm.1-68), C minor (mm. 69-129), C major (mm. 130-183).

The opening C major section can also be divided into three parts: (1) a majestic French overture-like beginning (Ex. 4-1), (2) a short trio section (for two manuals and pedal with the pedal carrying the opening motive: mm. 8-11), and (3) a closing section which is divided into a *grand jeu* (mm. 12-26), a *dialogue* section (mm. 27-48), and a concluding *grand jeu* from mm. 48-68. Throughout the *Offertoire* the main theme is developed and reiterated as the central focus

³² Anthony, 336.

³³ Ibid., 736.

³⁴ St. Gervais is the church where the Couperin family were organists from 1650 to 1826. This is a typical organ of the French Baroque era. Arnold, 134.

³⁵ Apel, 738.

of the piece. Couperin freely moves between three, four, and five-part textures while the harmony gradually increases in complexity, adding additional non-harmonic tones as it progresses.



Ex. 4-1 : Couperin, *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm.1-8.

In the middle section (mm.69-129), Couperin changes registration to give some respite to the ear, then writes an imitative trio in C minor with voices in right hand, left hand, and pedal. The trio is based on a contrasting theme which is retained in the subsequent four-voice fugue. The fugue has an initial exposition, followed by a partial re-exposition, an interlude, and another complete exposition.

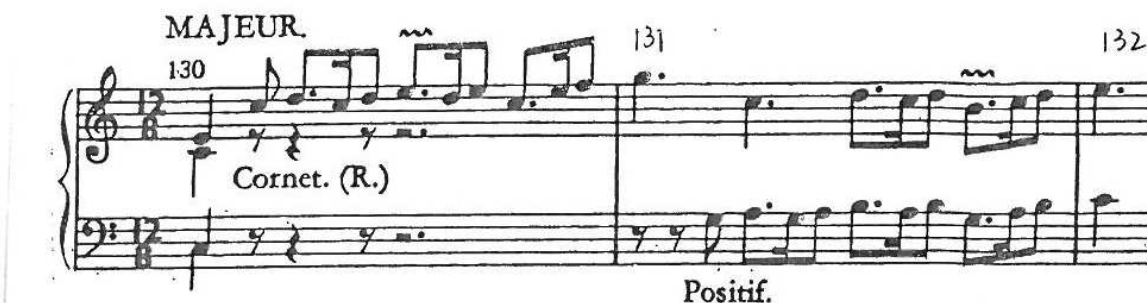


Ex. 4-2 : Couperin, *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm. 69-75.



Ex. 4-2 : Couperin, *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm. 96-102.

In the last section (mm.130-183), we can find points of imitation in C major in the style of a French gigue, one of the most popular Baroque instrumental dances. Ongoing dotted figuration, dialogue form, and the imitative texture of the C major gigue are matched well in the closing of this great *Offertoire*.



Ex. 4-3 : Couperin, *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm. 130-131.

Nicolas de Grigny (c.1672-1703)

Nicolas de Grigny, widely regarded as the finest composer of the French Baroque organ school, was born into a musical family in Reims. In 1693, at the age of twenty-one, Grigny became the organist of the abbey church of Saint-Denis. He remained in this position for two years, during which time he studied with Nicolas Lebègue. Shortly thereafter he moved back to

his hometown where he was appointed organist at Notre Dame de Reims, the cathedral where the French kings were crowned.

Grigny's only work, *Premier Livre d'Orgue* (1699), is rich in elegant ornaments, effective dissonances, chromatic writing, and well-structured complexities. The entire volume is the most sophisticated collection of organ music in the French Baroque period. In 1703, J. S. Bach copied Grigny's *Premier Livre d'Orgue* for his own study and use, attesting to its superb quality.³⁶

Grigny's *Premier Livre d'Orgue* contains one organ Mass and five Latin hymns settings.³⁷ He was the first to write five-voice fugues in France. Six of the eight fugues in the collection are for five voices. These fugues are the summit of French composition in this genre.³⁸

Grigny used the *Grand Jeu* to show the virtuosity of the performer in rapid figuration, fast scales, well-defined ornamentation, and frequent manual changes. While utilizing pre-existing styles and forms, Grigny developed these pieces into the most stylistically advanced *Grand Jeu* movements in the French Baroque organ repertoire.

Offertoire sur les grands jeux

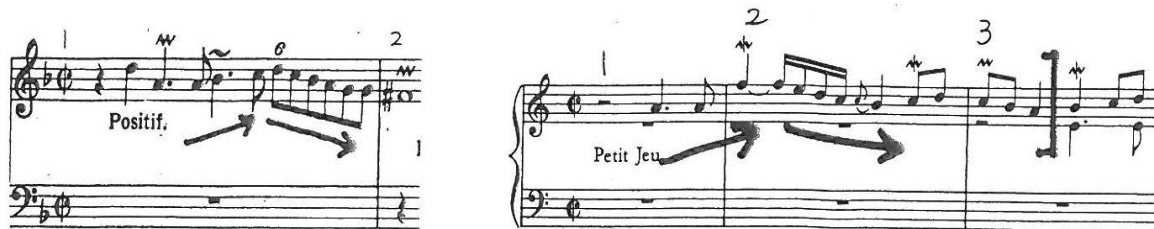
The first section of duple time is an expanded version of the opening of Niver's *Offerte* of 1667.³⁹ The shape of the subject is the same between the two works (ascending followed by descending motion) (Ex. 5-1).

³⁶ Anthony, 338.

³⁷ Arnold, 135. Five hymns: *Veni Creator Spiritus*, *Pange lingua*, *Verbum supernum*, *Ave maris stella*, and *A Solis ortus*. These hymns were performed in the Vespers and Lauds services on the most important feast days of the year.

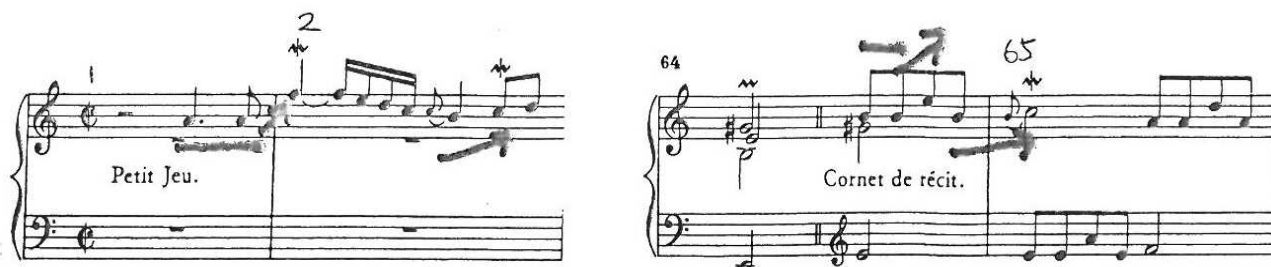
³⁸ Anthony, 338.

³⁹ Ponsford, 308.



Ex. 5-1 : Nivers, *Offerte*, m.1 and Grigny's *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm.1-3.

It begins with a point of imitation on the *petit jeu* (Soprano-Alto-Tenor-Bass-Tenor) followed by an extended dialogue, which places the coupled registration of the *grand orgue* division alternatively in the bass and treble range. The final bass entry is notable for its figuration, resembling a *basse de trompette* movement (m. 44-50). From measure 52, the second point of imitation starts in the *grand jeu* (Soprano-Alto-Tenor-Bass). The first section concludes with echo passages built on the subject-related material (Ex. 5-2) and ends with an extended final cadence.⁴⁰



Ex. 5-2 : Grigny, *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm. 1-2 and 64.

The second section begins with a point of imitation (Soprano-Alto-Tenor-Bass) in 6/4 time based on a step-wise descending hexachord which is frequently contrasted with roughly equivalent ascending passages. A long dialogue between the *petit jeu* and the *cornet séparé*

⁴⁰ Echo practice is similar to dialogue style involving dialogue between *cornet de récit* and *echos*.

ensues. The main theme of this dialogue is related to the descending hexachord (Ex.5-3), juxtaposed with ascending passages.



Ex. 5-3 : Grigny, *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm. 85-86.

After finishing the dialogue section, we have another point of imitation starting in measure 135 (Tenor-Alto-Alto-Soprano-Tenor-Bass-Bass-Bass). The entire point of imitation section is extended and the duration between each subject becomes progressively shorter (Ex. 5-4).

Two systems of musical notation for piano in 6/4 time. The first system shows measures 142, 143, 144, and 145. The second system shows measures 146, 147, and 148. The notation features multiple voices with overlapping lines and rests, and piano accompaniment in the bass clef. Handwritten measure numbers are placed above the staves.

Ex. 5-4 : Grigny, *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm.142-148.

This section concludes over a lengthy dominant pedal point resolving eventually with five-part writing (mm.171-205) (Ex. 5-5).

The image shows a musical score for five staves. The top staff is in treble clef, and the middle two staves are in bass clef. The bottom staff is a separate line for a pedal point, labeled 'Pedalle.' with a long horizontal line and a wavy line underneath. The music consists of several measures with various notes and rests. The bottom staff has a long horizontal line with a wavy line underneath, indicating a sustained pedal point. The top staff has notes with various ornaments and dynamics. The middle two staves have notes and rests, with some notes having wavy lines underneath. The bottom staff has a long horizontal line with a wavy line underneath, indicating a sustained pedal point. The bottom staff has a long horizontal line with a wavy line underneath, indicating a sustained pedal point.

Ex. 5-5 : Grigny, *Offertoire sur les grands jeux*, mm. 171-175.

Grigny's *Offertoire* is as expansive as Couperin's, but having more contrapuntal sophistication, depth of expression, sophisticated ornamentation, and virtuosity. Apel sums up the role Grigny plays in French organ music,

Grigny's compositions represent the culmination of French organ music, the most significant achievement that this art could attain within its limited scope. Neither Grigny nor his successors were able to break through these limitations, in several of his pieces he created works of high rank and lasting significance.⁴¹

Gaspard Corrette (1670/71- c.1730)

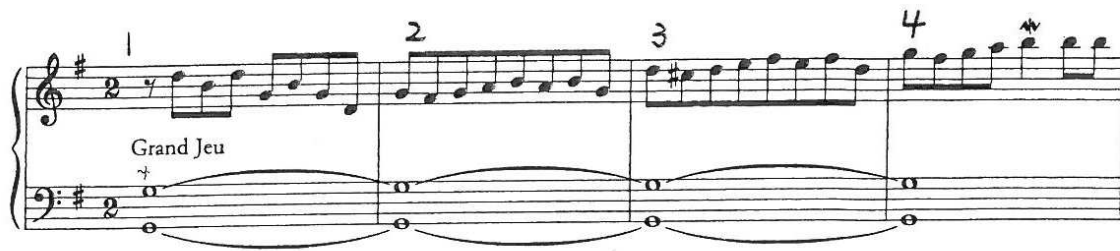
Gaspard Corrette, the father of Michel Corrette, seems to have spent most or all of his career in Rouen, where he served as organist at several different churches. His principal work is *Messe du 8e ton à l'usage des Dames Religieuses* (Mass on the 8th tone for the use of lady religious) in 1703. This mass consists of the usual movements for the four parts of the Ordinary,

⁴¹ Apel, 741.

to which he added two *Graduels*, an *Offerte*, and two *Elevations*.⁴² This is his only surviving composition, inscribed “for the use of women in religious orders and serviceable to those who play the organ.”⁴³

Offerte - Grand dialogue à trois Chœurs

The *Offerte* is the longest movement, which comprises 205 measures. This is even longer than Couperin’s or Grigny’s settings. He opens on the *grand jeu*, not the *petit jeu*, a more unusual choice (Ex. 6-1). Much of the time in the opening section he is juxtaposing activity in one hand with pedal points or static music in the other.



Ex. 6-1 : Corrette, *Offerte - Grand dialogue à trois Chœurs*, mm. 1-4.

In measure 31-33, we find a rise in the range of the roulades and motives. This is typical for the middle section of a *grand jeu* movement; it is more unusual to find it this early in the piece. Up until m. 50 the piece is actually constructed quite tightly, all based on a single subject. Also, we have the roulades in m. 59-74 that go up to E, G, A, B, and C; again this is extraordinary. Following this, he repeats a passage six times in sequential fashion to take the range back down again (mm.77-82) (Ex. 6-2).

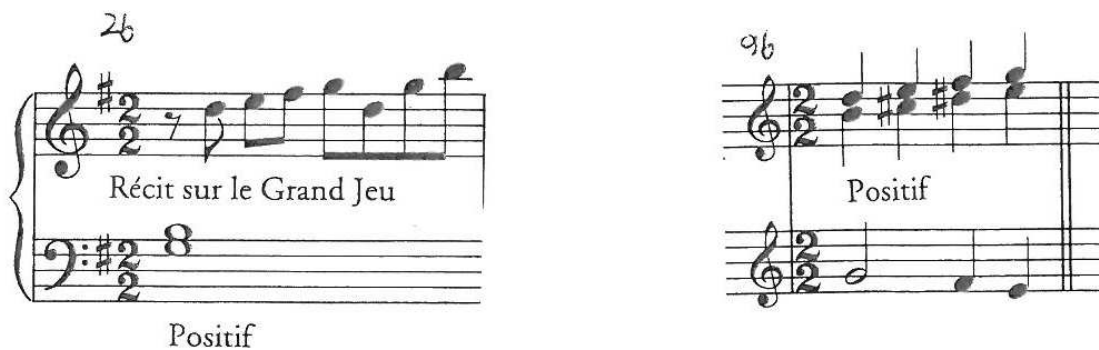
⁴² Ibid., 743

⁴³ In his preface he includes some discussion of ornamentation and registration.



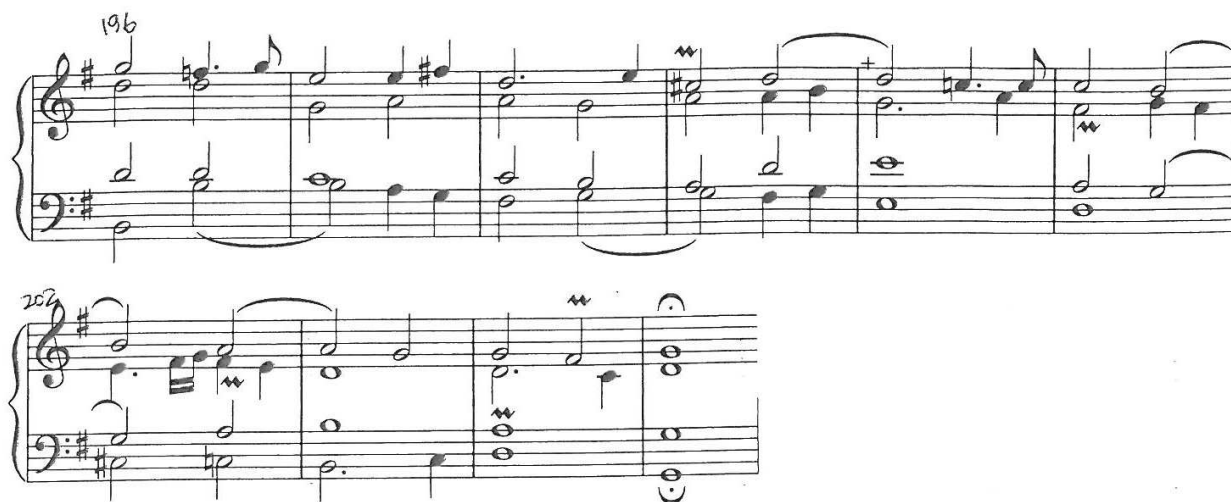
Ex. 6-2 : Corrette, *Offerte - Grand dialogue à trois Chœurs*, mm. 77-82.

The echo section starting in measure 85 is again sequential, a different approach to echo technique. After the echo section, there are rising and falling lines from m. 90-103. Notice the use of the stepwise motion of a fourth in m. 96-135. This rising fourth could be derived from the rising fourth at the start of the principal theme in m. 26 (Ex. 6-3).



Ex. 6-3 : Corrette, *Offerte - Grand dialogue à trois Chœurs*, mm.26 and 96.

Interestingly at the end of the G major section, he marked a “star” as an indication of a potential stopping place if the liturgical action is complete.⁴⁴ In the 6/4 fugue the tonic pedal points in m. 168-171 and m. 174-177 prepare the way for a concluding passage in duple meter near the end (mm. 187-205). Finally, in the closing *lentement*, he employs many suspensions to achieve gravitas, an appropriate conclusion to such a massive piece (mm. 196-205) (Ex. 6-4).



Ex. 6-4 : Corrette, *Offerte - Grand dialogue à trois Chœurs*, mm. 196-205.

Conclusion

Because of Louis XIV’s power, the court was the key setting for the development of French Baroque music. Organ composers cultivated the new style and made their own unique contribution. The use of colorful registrations, dance-like rhythms, ornamentation, and the French overture could all be found in French Baroque organ music.

⁴⁴ In his preface, he indicates it is permitted to stop at m. 133, if the liturgical action was completed. The liturgical requirements throughout much of the history of the Catholic church suggest that music is there to support the liturgy, thus, when the liturgical action is completed, to continue with music is to see music in a concert (i.e. secular) role. Frescobaldi says the same thing in his prefaces.

From Nivers to Corrette, duple and triple meter were typically found within the *Offertoire*. Composers also used contrapuntal techniques, expanded texture, dissonances and gradually added a more active pedal line. The fully developed style of the French overture with its dotted notes and roulades gradually became a part of the opening section of many *Offertoires*.

Within the parameters of the period we find in Nivers the flowing style typical of late Renaissance music, the theme and variations writing of Lebègue, trio sections employing right hand, left hand and pedal in Couperin and Grigny, and the culmination of the style with Grigny's five-part writing, extended dialogue section, counterpoint, depth of expression, sophisticated ornamentation, and virtuosity. Corrette pushes the boundaries of the style with extended sequential passages and suspensions.

The organ Mass was the most important classical French organ genre. Among the various movements of the organ Mass, the *Offertoire* is typically the most brilliant, longest and most improvisatory piece. Without any need for *alternatim* practice, it expanded the expressive range of the music and the instrument and achieved one of the great peaks in the entire French tradition dating even to our own time.

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