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Library Notes

The Alfred Denis Cortot Collection at the University of Kentucky

David Farrell and Charles Lord

CORTOT AND HIS LIBRARY

Alfred Denis Cortot (1877-1962), one of the most distinguished musicians of the twentieth century, excelled as a performer, as a scholar and teacher, and as a bibliophile. The third of these "careers" makes the Frenchman of particular interest to Kentuckians, for a portion of his collection is now a treasure of King Library.

Cortot's career as a performer began in 1896 when he won the prestigious First Prize in Piano at the Paris Conservatory (he had been a student of Descombes, one of the last of Chopin's pupils). For the next forty years or so, he gave concerts in Europe and America. As a soloist he was particularly admired for his interpretations of the works of Beethoven, Chopin, and the moderns, including Debussy, Fauré and Chabrier. He also performed with distinction in a trio with Jacques Thibaud on violin and Pablo Casals on 'cello. The group won great popular and critical acclaim through Europe but broke up on a tragic note when Thibaud was killed in an airplane accident. The friendship of Casals and Cortot later ended in bitterness. Casals, who could not, even for his music, lay aside his political principles, spurned Cortot after World War II, because Cortot had remained in Paris performing for French collaborators and the Nazis. Cortot was temporarily banned from performing in France after the war, but he regained the right in a highly publicized court case.

It is worth mentioning that, soon after leaving the conservatory, Cortot spent several seasons as assistant conductor of the Wagner performances at Bayreuth, Germany. He became an associate of Cosima Wagner, the composer's widow, and was selected by her in 1902 to conduct the French premiere of *Götterdämmerung*. In 1904

he assisted at the Paris premiere of *Tristan*. At approximately the same time he organized a choral society in Paris which performed an astonishing series of premieres, including *Parsifal*, Brahms's Requiem, and Beethoven's Mass in D.

Cortot was equally successful as a scholar and teacher. He wrote or edited numerous monographs, textbooks, and musical scores, including *Aspects de Chopin* and *La Musique Française de Piano*. When he returned permanently to Paris from Bayreuth in 1907, he joined the conservatory faculty (as its youngest member) as professor of piano, and at about the same time he founded with A. Mangeot the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris. He continued teaching until 1920 when he decided to devote his energies entirely to performance. In later years he returned to the conservatory and was still giving master classes in his eighties.

Cortot learned his love of books in his earliest years. He was never sent to school and described himself as an autodidact, that is, a totally self-taught learner. He began collecting books seriously around 1913, when his performing career was in full swing. And, although he collected actively for only about fifteen years, he managed to assemble one of the most important libraries in the history of musicology.

Upon Cortot's death in 1962 his library numbered approximately eleven hundred items, including printed music, autograph scores, librettos, and treatises. Some of the rarest of musicological pieces belonged to him, including incunabula (the earliest printed books), an autograph fragment of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and other unique manuscript and printed material. The library had been cataloged in 1936¹, and so was well known to scholars and collectors.

The library was offered for sale in the year of Cortot's death, and eventually was split between four major institutions. The British Museum took the editions of early printed music; Berkeley selected the scores and librettos; and the Newberry Library in Chicago and the University of Kentucky shared the printed books approximately equally, with the Newberry taking mostly sacred music.

Kentucky's portion of the library numbers about three hundred volumes, including a few pamphlets and periodicals. There are fourteen major subjects and books printed in eight languages over five centuries.

The largest group of materials is nearly one hundred volumes on

music theory, including medieval theory, thorough-bass, counterpoint, and composition. Another large group deals with voice: chant, opera, vocal scores, and works about various artists and composers. There are also significant sections treating scientific subjects (mathematics, acoustics, physics), aesthetics, and the famous eighteenth century "war" (the "Guerre des Bouffons" and its various manifestations including the Gluck-Piccinni controversy) between the proponents of the French and Italian schools of opera. Of course, numbers do not tell the entire story. Even a small collection of original sources such as these would be important. The 1936 bibliography cites eleven authors whose works are considered the rarest in the history of Western music. All were represented in Cortot's library at the time of his death, and seven are represented in Kentucky's Cortot Collection.

Two of Kentucky's rarest volumes, Lodovico Fogliani's *Musica Theorica* (1529) and Balthasar Prasperg's *Clarissima Plane* (1501) actually were purchased by the libraries several years after the rest of the collection. Through good fortune, Adelle Dailey, the university's music librarian, came across them in a store, when she was visiting London. Both bore the famous Cortot bookplate, but neither had been included in the 1962 sale. Presumably they had been acquired by friends or heirs or thieves of Cortot before, or shortly after, his death.

One question that library visitors frequently ask is how Cortot managed to purchase such rarities. He was not a rich man, but he was an astute collector, and he was lucky. The focus of his collecting was narrow; he knew exactly what he wanted, and he selected books solely for their subject matter (thus avoiding expensive bindings which, like the frames around paintings, frequently exceed the value of their contents). The period of his greatest activity—1913-1930—was also the period he concentrated on his performing career, when he had ready cash, and access to major dealers in Europe and America.

SOME SIGNIFICANT TREATISES IN THE CORTOT COLLECTION AT KENTUCKY

The portion of Cortot's library which the University of Kentucky acquired is a unique repository of original theoretical treatises of the Renaissance, Baroque, and early Classic periods.

Renaissance items in the collection include both original works

and translations or editions of ancient treatises. Noteworthy among the latter are an edition of the works of Boethius (Venice, 1492) and a small anthology of Greek authors in Latin (1567) which prints, among other items, works by the Greek theorists Aristoxenus, Ptolemy, and Aristotle. While the anthology was not the first such translation, it exemplifies the attention Renaissance theorists were paying to original Greek sources.

Franchino Gaffurio's *Practica Musicae* (1496) is the earliest of the major treatises in the Kentucky collection written during the Renaissance. Its encyclopedic nature serves as a point of departure for the collection as a whole, which also includes Gaffurio's *Angelicum ac Divinum Opus Musice* (1496) and *De Harmonia Musicorum Instrumentorum* (1518). The Cortot copies of these three works are from editions printed in 1502, 1508, and 1518, respectively.

Among the most important of the Renaissance treatises in the collection is a first edition of Henricus Glareanus's *Dodekachordon* (1547). Its significance lies not only in the author's contributions to music theory, such as his extension of the ecclesiastical modes to include our major and minor scales, but also in his editions of many complete polyphonic works of the period. Kentucky's copy contains extensive manuscript notes, apparently in Glareanus's own hand.²

In terms of theoretical importance, however, Glareanus must yield first rank for the sixteenth century to Gioseffo Zarlino. His three most significant treatises are *Institutione Harmoniche* (1558), *Dimostrazioni Harmoniche* (1571), and *Sopplimenti Musicali* (1588). All three are found in Kentucky's collection—the latter two in first editions. Zarlino's theoretical discoveries are legion; they include his discussions of counterpoint, the equal tempered scale, and underlay of text, as well as his recognition of the triad as a structural entity.

The *Musica Theorica* (1529) of Lodovico Fogliani, one of the two volumes discovered in London by Adelle Dailey, formed the basis for Zarlino's better known works. Another historically interesting treatise contemporary with Zarlino's, is that of Nicola Vicentino—*L'Antica Musica Ridotta Alla Moderna Prattica* (1555). It contains a thorough treatment of contrapuntal techniques, but is most interesting for its discussion of chromaticism. Vicentino divided the whole step into five unequal intervals and invented a special notational system to illustrate them. His experiments, both in theoretical matters and later in building keyboards employing his

new intervals, may not have had much direct influence on later theorists, but they still are symptomatic of the intense concern at the time with the rapidly developing domain of chromaticism. Another figure of interest was a pupil of Zarlino, Vincenzo Galilei, who disagreed emphatically with some of his master's more progressive views. Galilei published his rebuttals in a well-known *Dialogo Della Musica Antica Et Moderna* (1581). This barrage against Zarlino is not found in the Kentucky collection, but another such volume appearing in 1589 on the heels of Zarlino's *Sopplimenti* is in King Library.

Two other treatises based largely on Zarlino round out the Italian Renaissance portion of the collection. One of these is Lodovico Zacconi's *Prattica di Musica* (1592). Kentucky has Part I of this treatise, which was originally published in two parts—one in 1592 and one in 1622. The volume is a rarity but not as rare as Pedro Cerone's *Melopeo y maestro* (1613),³ which is also at Kentucky. The *Melopeo* is over eleven hundred pages long and is truly encyclopedic. Despite a rather late date, it covers the style of writing in the Renaissance. The volume would likely receive more attention from music theorists today if it were more readily available—in language as well as in the number of copies.

Although the Italians dominated the writing of musical treatises in the sixteenth century, a more international group of theorists emerged during the seventeenth. Among these were a number in England; the four most significant are represented in Kentucky's collection. To begin with, Thomas Morley's *A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music* (1597) appears in an edition of 1771. Covering rudiments, counterpoint, and composition in a dialogue format, it summarizes practices of the Renaissance period in a practical manner, avoiding the metaphysical speculations of previous theorists. Morley's work thus represents an effort to cultivate an audience of amateurs as well as professionals. Following Morley's lead, Charles Butler, John Playford, and Christopher Simpson wrote practical manuals, each dealing with a slightly later style. Butler's *Principles of Musik* (1636) is the most erudite of the three, while Simpson's *A Compendium of Practical Musick in Five Parts* (1667) is the most carefully organized for an amateur's self-instruction. The Cortot Collection at Kentucky contains an original edition of the Butler and a 1706 edition of the Simpson, which is entitled *A Compendium; or, Introduction to Practical Musick* (1706). Both the Playford and Simpson volumes

were very well received; they each went through numerous printings until finally made obsolete in England by a translation of the writings of Jean Phillippe Rameau in the 1750s. In fact, Playford's *An Introduction to the Skill of Musick* (1674) received revision by none other than Henry Purcell in 1700. Kentucky has both the original and revised versions.

Several important seventeenth century theorists from the continent are also well represented in the collection. For instance, King Library has a 1683 edition of a small but significant document called *Compendium Musicae*, penned by the philosopher and mathematician René Descartes in 1618 but not published until 1650. The volume is important mainly for its application of a scientific approach and for the drive toward clarity and simplicity of explanation which resulted.

Other seventeenth century writings include Marin Mersenne's *Harmonicorum Libri* (1635), Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia Universalis* (1650), and Charles Masson's *Nouveau Traité des Regles pour la Composition de la Musique* (1694; King Library's copy is the third edition, 1705). The Masson is perhaps the first important book to limit scale forms to major and minor. The Mersenne is a bit unusual; it is a Latin version of his *Harmonie Universelle* (1636) printed for the benefit of foreigners who did not read French. Although it is similar to the *Harmonie*, it is not identical with it, for it contains some material not included in the better-known French version.⁴

The eighteenth century writers represented in the Cortot Collection begin with two names not without influence today among theorists; Johann Fux for counterpoint and Jean Phillippe Rameau for harmony. Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* appears both in its original edition of 1725 and in an Italian translation of 1761. Six of the most significant of Rameau's numerous writings are represented at Kentucky, all in original editions. These volumes are the *Traité de l'Harmonie* (1722), the most important of all, the *Nouveau Système* (1726), the *Generation Harmonique* (1737), the *Démonstration du Principe de l'Harmonie* (1750), the *Observations sur Notre Instinct pour la Musique* (1754) and the *Code de Musique Pratique* (1760).

Other eighteenth century writings in the collection span a wide gamut—from general music histories to music dictionaries and instrumental pedagogy. Highlights in the last category include thorough-bass treatises. The best known authors represented are

Johann Mattheson, whose *Kleine General-Bass-Schule* (1735) is a condensation of his *Grosse General-Bass-Schule* (1731), and Johann Heinichen, whose *Der General-Bass in der Composition* is at Kentucky both in its original version of 1711 and in a revision of 1728. Another area represented is practical pedagogy. Three of these treatises are well known and valuable; the Johann Quantz *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte Traversiere zu Spielen* (1752; edition in King Library 1789), the Leopold Mozart *Versuch einer Gründlichen Violinschule* (editions of 1756 and 1770 at Kentucky), and the C. P. E. Bach *Versuch über die Wahre Art das Klavier zu Spielen* (part 1, 1753, part 2, 1762; originals at Kentucky). These volumes range well beyond the boundaries of pure pedagogy to offer valuable comments on topics of general theory and musicianship.

Authors more in the mainstream of pure theoretical activity include Giuseppe Tartini, Friedrich Marpurg, and Johann Kirnberger. Original editions of Tartini's most important works are in the Cortot Collection. The *Traattato di Musica* (1754) is particularly significant, as it displays both his rational and scientific approach and also the unfortunate liberties he took with some of his mathematical results. Kirnberger and Marpurg are each well represented also, the former with two of his most significant titles, the latter with nine of a more varied importance. Marpurg's *Abhandlung von der Fuge* (1753-54), for example, is an important treatise stemming from Fux; Marpurg's harmonic theories are based on Rameau, but they suffer from the author's incomplete understanding of Rameau's ideas.⁵

Finally, music dictionaries and histories complement Kentucky's holdings in musical theory. Those of Sébastien de Brossard (1703) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1775) are notable among eighteenth century dictionaries, while the writings of the Englishman Sir John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776), and Charles Burney—four titles including *A General History of Music* (1776-89)—provide the historical background for the period.

Alfred Cortot, the man and his library, has left a significant legacy to musicology and music theory. Pursuing his vocations with remarkable energy and taste, he brought together a unique collection, one that is nearly perfect of its type, and one that now enriches both scholarship and Kentucky.

NOTES

¹*Bibliothèque Alfred Cortot, Première Partie: Théorie de la Musique*, (Argenteuil: R. Coulouma, 1936). For a list of the Cortot Collection at the University of Kentucky see *University of Kentucky Library Notes*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring 1970).

²Groves records a similar copy with notes and corrections in Glareanus's hand at the Library of Congress.

³Despite the language of this work it derives directly from the Italian scene.

⁴François Lesure, Introduction, *Harmonie Universelle*, by Marin Mersenne, facsimile edition (Paris: Editions de Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1963), p. vii.

⁵Joyce Mekeel, "The Harmonic Theories of Kirnberger and Marpurg," *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (November 1960), p. 169.