



COMMUNICATION: REPORT

## The Rediscovery of the *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre à jouer de la harpe* by Michel Corrette

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I am someone who is drawn to missing objects from the past. I try to revive interest in lost books, scores or art works by recirculating their titles and authors, in publications and with colleagues and friends. I suppose my hope is that by giving these items a new breath of life in contemporary scholarship, they might just turn up one day.

The *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre à jouer de la harpe* (1774) by Michel Corrette (1707–1795) was previously known only from descriptions. When a copy came to light and went up for auction in late 2016, I was delighted. I didn't know what to expect, as this book was merely one of many titles on my list of over one hundred harp methods from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although Corrette himself was not known as a harpist, it turns out that his *Nouvelle méthode* is a unique resource for the history of harps, harp pedagogy and historical performing practices. This copy of the *Nouvelle méthode* is a hardbound book consisting of forty-six pages preceded by a frontispiece illustrating a harpist in a plausible playing position with a score open on a table beside her. The engraving is accompanied by a quatrain, the text of which comes from one of the two *ariettes* for voice and harp included at the end of the volume. The method contains an introductory history of the harp, followed by fourteen chapters, two *chansons* and over thirty short simple pieces. The Australian historical harpist Hannah Lane wrote an informative post on the method when it was acquired by the library of the University of Melbourne in 2017 (<https://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/library/collections/2017/03/22/a-lost-eighteenth-century-harp-method-rediscovered-michel-correttes-nouvelle-methode-pour-apprendre-a-jouer-de-la-harpe-1774-a-new-acquisition-for-rare-music/>).

The online *Catalogue des ouvrages théoriques, manuscrits et imprimés en France entre 1660 et 1800* (<http://catalogue.philippe-lescat-asso.fr>) by the late Philippe Lescat includes thirty-six publications by Corrette, of which four are currently lost or of unknown whereabouts. The publication of the harp method was advertised in the *Mercur de France* on 1 January 1775. While this year is often cited as the date of publication, 1774 can now be established as the correct date, as it appears on the title-page. Hence, it can be considered the third harp treatise to be published in the eighteenth century. (The harpist Philippe-Jacques Meyer (1737–1819) published two earlier methods: *Essai sur la vraie manière de jouer de la harpe*, Op. 1 (Paris: author, 1763), and *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre à jouer de la harpe*, Op. 9 (Paris: Bouin), in early 1774.)

The newly invented harp of the eighteenth century was one with pedals, which Denis Diderot called a 'harpe organisée' (*Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts mécaniques, avec leur explication*, quatrième livraison (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, 1767), Lutherie, Seconde suite, Planche XIX). For further details about the increasing number of pedals added to harps in the eighteenth century see my PhD dissertation, 'The "Harpe organisée", 1720–1840: Rediscovering the Lost Pedal Techniques on Harps with a Single-Action Pedal Mechanism' (Universiteit Leiden, 2016), 27–34. Players from the Alsace region and Germany brought the new instrument to Paris and harp making began in earnest. Initially, keyboard repertory

was played on the harp, and few works were published specifically for the instrument. In 1774, for example, only about ten volumes of music for the harp were published in Paris. The harp at this time became identified with the Parisian salon culture, and although most of the first generation of harpists were male and foreign, their pupils were nearly exclusively female and noble.

The method is written for two types of harps: one with pedals and one without. Corrette describes the latter as a single-rowed harp with manual levers which alter the pitch of each string by one semitone. This instrument was known as a *Hakenharfe*, *harpe à crochets* or *harpe simple*. Corrette's treatise is the only harp method written in French to include this type of instrument in the book's title and dedicate a chapter to it. The engraving actually portrays such a harp. The manual levers are called 'petit crochets', a term that can be confusing since at the same time a type of pedal-harp mechanism was also referred to as 'crochets', most notably on harps built by Jean-Henri Naderman (1734–1799) and Georges Cousineau (1733–1800). From at least the late fourteenth century, harpes simples have always coexisted alongside more complex chromatic or pedal harps, probably because of their uncomplicated construction and their being less expensive. However, there is currently a lacuna in research regarding these types of harp.

Corrette's fascinating introductory chapter provides a chronological history of the harp from King David through to the Greeks and Romans, with some of his phrases having been copied from the *Histoire de la musique et de ses effets, depuis son origine jusqu'à présent* by Jacques Bonnet (Paris: Jean Cochart, Etienne Ganeau, Jacques Quillau, 1715). He continues with a long discussion on the seventeenth-century chromatic triple harp, quoting Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie universelle contenant la theorie et la pratique de la musique* (Paris: R. Charlemagne et P. Ballard, 1636). No other harp method refers to a recent history of the instrument, invariably preferring to place the highly decorated pedal harp as the direct descendent of King David's lyre. Uniquely, Corrette's method provides a missing link between the renaissance and baroque harps and the new pedal harps. He would have witnessed the transformation of a Paris without harps to a capital city where the harp became one of the most important instruments in society.

Corrette's is the only harp method to have been written by someone not considered a specialist performer on the instrument, and for this reason, he offers useful insights as an external observer rather than as a practitioner. For example, he points out that the pedals on the harp have a different function from those on the organ. He also remarks that the physical movement of pressing a pedal downwards raises the pitch by a semitone. In general, the method is so comprehensive that anyone, then or now, could pick up the harp and, by the end of the book, have truly learned to play it. I can even imagine that Corrette could probably play all the pieces in the method on a harp, with or without pedals.

The method contains practical information on how to tune different harps, discusses equal and unequal temperaments, pitch ('Ton de l'opera'), using a tuning fork ('Ton d'acier à l'Angloise') and string diameters. Corrette also provides various fingering charts for scale passages and chords, and all the pieces include fingerings for both hands. Regarding performance practice, he includes examples of several ornaments ('cadences battues', 'jettées' and 'doublées'), and outlines differences between the French and Italian styles of ornamentation ('pincé à la maniere italienne'). There are also explanations on how to play different arpeggio patterns or formulas for accompanying styles, called 'batteries'.

Chapters 8 to 10 deal with the new-fangled pedals on the harp. The exercises given for the use of the pedals are closely linked to learning harmony on the harp in a practical way. He uses a simple cycle of fifths where one pedal is moved at a time in order to modulate to the next key, and he gives examples in major and minor keys. The solutions are very close to simple harmony exercises, where voice leading is respected according to the rules set down in basso-continuo treatises of the time. Corrette also discusses the necessity of using enharmonic notes on the harp, fundamental to moving pedals, in a musical way.

In the course of this ongoing research, I have found some historical inconsistencies in Corrette's method. He states that Joseph Sauveur (1653–1716) wrote on the harp, but I have not found any references to the instrument in Sauveur's works up to now. Corrette incorrectly describes and attempts to notate the tuning of a triple harp after Mersenne. He also states that on a triple harp the F $\sharp$ , G $\sharp$  and B $\flat$  strings were coloured red while the C $\sharp$  and E $\flat$  strings were coloured blue, and that this complicated system of colours led to the practical invention of pedals.

The collection of pieces that he includes are graded, beginning with very easy ones, first in C major and then in G major. He then introduces pieces in other keys (B flat major, F major, A minor) with some modulations, including one which has a descending chromatic line in the bass. The pieces are often based on well-known melodies such as 'La Fürstemberg' and 'Que vous dirai-je maman', but there are also minuets, allemandes, marches, polonaises and contredanses. There are no pedal markings, which is normal for the time, and all the pieces are actually playable on an harpe simple. Corrette may have collaborated with a harpist, perhaps Georg Adam Goepfert (c1727–c1809), whom he mentions as a 'famous player of the harp'.

The *Nouvelle méthode* by Michel Corrette distinguishes itself from all other harp methods, perhaps precisely because its author was neither a harpist, a harp builder nor a publisher. Rather, he places the harp in the context of the music of the day, of other instruments and of matters such as accompanying styles, harmony and ornamentation. His method has a distinct air of being the work of an eighteenth-century independent researcher who has no particular axe to grind. I am currently preparing a comprehensive article on this topic as well as a translation and recording of this remarkable addition to historical harp sources.

Born in Ireland, **Maria Christina Cleary** studied psychology at Trinity College Dublin and later harp at the Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag and the Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel. In 2016 she was awarded a PhD by the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts at the Universiteit Leiden. Her doctoral research was carried out in and through artistic practice, and her thesis constitutes the only major study on harp pedalling techniques. She teaches historical harps and historical approaches to music interpretation and performance at the Conservatorio di Musica E. F. Dall'Abaco in Verona and the Haute École de Musique de Genève.