



REVIEW: BOOK

Ouvertures à la française: migrations musicales dans l'espace germanique, 1660–1730

Louis Delpech

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While a student at the School of St Michael's in Lüneburg between 1700 and 1702, Johann Sebastian Bach had the opportunity to visit nearby Celle. There, as C. P. E. Bach and Agricola would later write, he could hear 'a once-celebrated cappella financed by the Duke of Celle and composed primarily of Frenchmen, and thereby learn the French taste, which, at that time and in those regions, was something entirely new' (256; my translations throughout). Louis Delpech has done the musicological community an enormous service in exploring the world of such musicians as those in the Celle cappella. He offers a view at once detailed and panoramic of the migration of French musicians to Germany (chapter 1), the courtly institutional structures in which they worked (chapter 2) and some of the practicalities of their lives (chapter 3). This panorama also encompasses the dissemination of French music as represented by printed editions, manuscript copies and other material sources (chapter 4), as well as shifts in the compositional and critical reception of the 'French taste' (chapter 5). Delpech thereby adds to recent scholarship on musical circulation and travelling musicians, offering a complement to research focused on the diaspora of Italian musicians in Germany. There were important differences to these modes of circulation, he emphasizes. Whereas Italian musicians in Germany were primarily highly specialized composers, singers or librettists, French ones were almost always polyvalent instrumentalists, especially string players and oboists (137).

In his Introduction, Delpech situates his study within the field of cultural transfer. He does address such issues as what Kusser, Telemann, Bach and others learned from French musicians at Celle, Dresden, Osnabrück and Hanover (the Saxon and Lower Saxon courts that were most receptive to French musicians). However, he considers the traditional goods of trade in histories of influence (compositional styles and critical ideas) only in his fifth chapter – that is, after meticulous examination of the human and material side of musical migrations. More a 'style of research' than a well-articulated methodology, his 'prosopographic approach' consists in 'elucidating the constants and the evolution of a social group from the angle of individual trajectories and specific biographies of its constituent members' (10). This approach carries over from the biographical to the musical domain in its careful attention to the provenance and dissemination of musical sources as material objects. It allows for a more detailed portrait of musical practices in Germany than would consideration of musical works as abstract entities (192).

In practice, this means that Delpech marshalls information culled from innumerable primary sources – personnel rosters, pay documents, receipts, inventories, court documents, baptism, marriage and death records, official correspondence, private letters, engraved editions, musical manuscripts, and private assemblages of music, to name but a few of the many types of sources surveyed – in order to reconstruct the movements of individual French musicians and individual musical

sources. Delpech has a talent for weaving disparate and often fragmentary information into coherent stories, and much of the pleasure of the book comes from the insight gained into everyday matters of musical practice: the interactions between musicians, patrons, and court and civic officials. This attention to detail also allows Delpech to shed light on many minor mysteries. For instance, Delpech reports that it hasn't yet been revealed how Jean-Baptiste Volumier (the violinist who organized the duel between Marchand and J. S. Bach in Dresden in 1717) first became acquainted with Bach. He notes that an undated inventory from Weimar lists a Cremonese 'Leib Violino' provided by Volumier, then that Volumier visited Cremona in 1715 to purchase instruments for the Dresden court. He hypothesizes that it was on Volumier's return journey from Cremona that the two became acquainted (288).

The myriad details also coalesce into the specific arguments made in each chapter. Chapter 1 ('Galant Europe as a Labour Market') follows the first groups of musicians venturing regularly beyond French borders. In the decades after the Thirty Years War, individual musicians would be engaged abroad, as for instance were Joseph and Anne de La Barre at the Swedish court, but circumstances such as an outbreak of the plague (1653), the abdication of Queen Christina (1654) or the Swedish–Danish War (1655) also led these musicians to Germany, amongst other destinations (24–28). Beginning in the 1660s, musicians travelled as part of itinerant theatrical troupes. Music was an integral part of spoken theatre, both within the acts and before, between and after them, and many actors also cultivated musical skills. While French spoken theatre found widespread favour amongst German and Holy Roman nobles, French operatic music was more selectively cultivated. There were often practical reasons for this having to do with the size of the companies. For instance, Michel de Villedieu's theatrical troupe had nineteen members all told; in 1699 Mézétin (Angelo Constantini) foresaw forty-six for his operatic troupe but eventually travelled with ninety-three to August the Strong's capital in Warsaw (49). The singers, dancers, musicians, machinists, costume-makers and other necessary personnel were not paid regularly, demanded to be released from service in 1701 and were allowed to travel to other courts by 1703; in 1705 the troupe was eventually disbanded (55). It had not been a striking success. Eventually, however, musicians travelled in small groups separate from theatrical companies, or, as was the case with the oboist François Desnoyers, were specifically sought out as celebrities (60).

The second chapter ('Administering French Music') examines the organization and politics of French musical establishments. Again, Delpech builds his arguments through a thorough examination of multiple individual cases and arrives at results that nuance our understanding of the field in interesting ways. In Germany at the end of the seventeenth century, 'French music' emerged as an administrative category before it became one of style or genre (73, 97–102). It could refer simply to musicians from France or to those who spoke French. As these musicians needed special travel and/or housing arrangements and generally carried on official correspondence in French, they were treated apart from other musicians, even as they often mixed with Germans and Italians in carrying out their musical duties. Delpech also challenges the assumption that the cultivation of French music necessarily implied a geopolitical orientation towards France. While the adoption of French culture and customs could indeed support a prince's attempt to assert independence from the Holy Roman Empire, as was the case with Duke Christian Ludwig I of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (75), it could also reflect personal taste. August the Strong, Prince-Elector of Saxony and eventually King of Poland, was one of the most dedicated patrons of French music but was at odds politically with both France and the Holy Roman Empire. For him, French music went with modernity – with *galanterie* (80–85).

In the third chapter ('*Frantzösische Musicanten: A Collective Biography*') Delpech examines the practicalities of musicians' lives, from the various reasons for their departure from France (guild restrictions on musicians in France, 142–144; better pay in Germany, 145) to matters of religion (many remained Catholic in Protestant lands, 151–154) to the cabals that were favourite and frequent causes of complaint (154–157) to the types of roles and tasks that they carried out (174–190). Delpech distinguishes between a migration of rupture, in which musicians settled abroad,

or rather found themselves in constant movement, and a migration of continuity, in which the country of origin remained the point of reference (141). Many were the reasons for both, but Delpech emphasizes the degree to which French musicians retained contacts with France. Another important aspect of daily life was the place of French music. While French spoken theatre offered essential opportunities, especially for small bands of string players (167), the author shows that these musicians also participated in chamber (or ‘table’) music and in the church (171–174).

In the fourth chapter (‘The Dissemination of Music’) Delpech again takes up the issue of what music was actually played, and notes that one must treat the source record carefully. Whereas manuscript transmission was essential for the dissemination of Italian music in Germany, printed editions played a much greater role in that of French music. This might lead one to overestimate the relative importance of printed representative works, such as operas and opera-ballets. For this reason, Delpech also examines the sources themselves – the printed editions, which can feature telling handwritten annotations or other evidence, as well as copies, manuscripts and other materials – to attempt a more complete picture of the practice of French music (192). He singles out the *air de cour*, the French cantata, the *petit motet*, the *motet à grand chœur* and the *livre d’orgue* as genres whose practice can easily escape notice (191).

German reception of French music, via the emulation or adaptation of French models, is the subject of the final chapter (‘The German Invention of French Music’). This is manifested musically through the emulation or adaptation of French models. Some individuals in early generations of composers modelled themselves explicitly on French models, as did Johann Sigismund Küsser in his suites by calling attention to a French style through titles, prefaces claiming the heritage of Lully, the use of French in the naming of the instruments and the placement of a French-style overture at the head of each suite (249). Later, composers such as Bach and Telemann approached the French style with an ear for ways in which it might be transformed. In his analyses, Delpech focuses in particular on readily audible features – rhythms, metres, formal arrangements – rather than on the intricacies of harmony or part-writing. Particularly interesting is his examination of the use of changes of mode without change of key for dramatic effect (271–282). The second part of the chapter examines the gradual shift in the connotations of French *galanterie* over the first few decades of the eighteenth century. Whereas it represented modernity at the turn of the century, by the 1730s Italian music had displaced its claim to such a status (299–304).

Even as he draws broad and convincing generalizations, Delpech also qualifies them. French music could develop differently and for different reasons as local situations dictated. Indeed, one finishes the book not only with a better understanding of the contributions of French musicians to musical life in Germany, but, despite the immense obstacles of historical distance and a fragmentary source record, some feel for the texture of a musical culture.

The book is carefully edited and sumptuously produced. It appears in the ‘Építome musicale’ series sponsored by the Centre d’études supérieures de la Renaissance at the Université de Tours. Delpech’s French is elegant and precise, and his book is in equal measures informative and enjoyable to read.

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