

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

MUSIC IN THE WESTERN WORLD

A History in Documents

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SCHIRMER

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This deed won me the highest honor I could have received; for the report of it, having spread throughout Rome, came as far as the ears of His Holiness, who did me the special favor a few days later of sending for me, and said to me, among other things, "We have heard that you have a special talent and we would like to hear you." I will not tell you here how happy His Holiness showed himself to be after having done me the honor of listening to me for more than two hours; some day you will see people worthy of being believed, and they will give you a full account of it.

André Maugars, *Response faite à un curieux sur le sentiment de la musique d'Italie, écrite à Rome le premier Octobre 1639*, trans. Walter H. Bishop, *Journal of the Viola da Gamba Society of America*, VIII (1971), 5–17. Reprinted by permission of Efrim Fruchtman, editor.

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Music under the Sun King

During the seventeenth century, which the French still call their "grand siècle," music attended the French kings everywhere. They rose in the morning to the sound of the oboes and brasses of the Great Stable (Grande Écurie), they danced to the music of their famous "twenty-four violins" (also known as the Grande Bande), and were regaled at meals by a smaller band of fiddlers, known as the Petits Violons. In the Royal Chapel they heard the crowning musical expressions of their majesty and power: the *grands motets*, often sung by a choir of sixty, accompanied by an orchestra to match. At its height under Louis XIV, the royal musical establishment at Versailles numbered some 120 musicians. The description given by Pierre Rameau, dancing master to Louis XV, of a court ball suggests some of this splendor, and also the rigid formality that governed the proceedings. The dances came in a prescribed order, as in the standardized instrumental dance suite established by the lutenists and harpsichordists of Louis XIV's time.

Of the Ceremonial Observed at the King's Grand Ball

I believed it impossible to give a description more likely to inspire regard for the ceremonies and rules of private balls than first to attempt some brief account of the King's Grand Ball, since it is the most important of all such functions and should serve as a model for private balls in regard to the order of the proceedings, and the respect and politeness to be observed thereat.

In the first place, none is admitted to the royal circle save Princes and Princesses of the Blood Royal, the Dukes and Peers, and Duchesses, and afterwards the other Lords and Ladies of the Court according to their rank. The Ladies are seated in front, while the Lords are placed behind them. Nevertheless, I have ventured to represent the latter standing [see the illustration], to avoid confusion in my figures, and to make them more easily seen.

Everyone being thus placed in order, when His Majesty wishes the ball to begin he rises, and the whole company does likewise.

The King takes up his position at that end of the room where the dancing is to begin, which is near the musicians. In the time of the late King [Louis XIV], the Queen



The King's Grand Ball. The entrance (that is, closest to the musicians) is described in the next-to-last paragraph of the extremely precise protocol of the *Maitre à danser*, Paris, 1725, f. 10.

danced with him, or in her absence, she danced herself first. Then the courtiers danced according to their rank. The King, retaining this order, they made the *Branle* [a dance in which the King opened, and all the Lords and Ladies followed]. At the conclusion of the strain

received; for the report of it, of His Holiness, who did me said to me, among other things, would like to hear you." I will not to be after having done me the day you will see people worthy of it.

Musique d'Italie, écrite à Rome le premier
Society of America, VIII (1971), 5-17.

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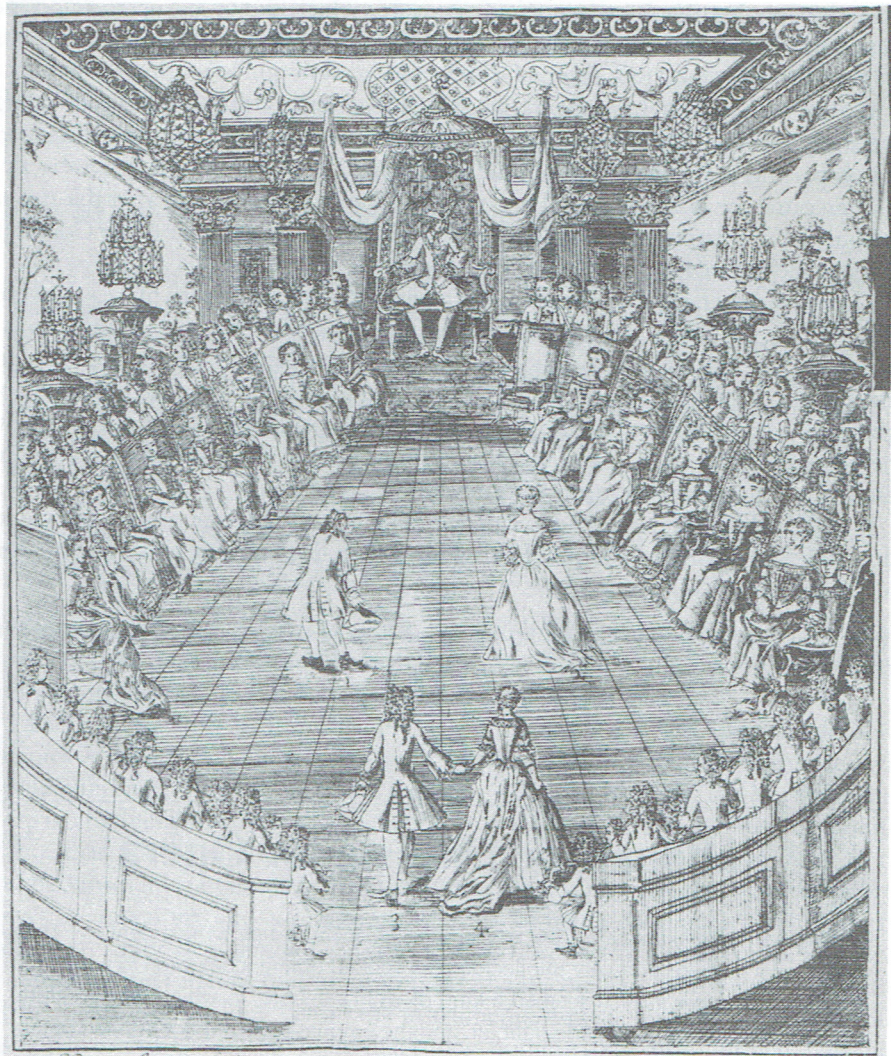
Grand Ball

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The King's Grand Ball. The musicians are seated at the rear of the ballroom, near the entrance (that is, closest to the reader), the King at the front. The moment depicted is described in the next-to-last paragraph of the accompanying text, where Rameau details the extremely precise protocol that was observed on such occasions. (Pierre Rameau, *Le Maître à danser*, Paris, 1725, facing p. 1. Engraving by the author.)

danced with him, or in her absence, the first Princess of the Blood, and they placed themselves first. Then the company took up their station behind them, two by two, according to their rank. The Lords stood on the left side, the Ladies on the right. Retaining this order, they made their bows in turn. Afterwards the King and Queen led the *Branle* [a dance in which the couples stand in long sets] with which all Court Balls opened, and all the Lords and Ladies followed Their Majesties, each on their own side. At the conclusion of the strain, the King and Queen went to the end of the line, then

the next couple led the *Branle* in their turn, after which they took up their position behind Their Majesties. This continued until all the couples had danced and the King and Queen were at the head again.

Then they danced the *Gavotte* in the same order as the *Branle*, each couple successively retiring to the end of the line. The dance finished, they made the same bows on parting as those with which the Ball opened.

Then came the *danses à deux*. Formerly the *Courante* was danced after the *Branles*, and Louis XIV, of happy memory, danced it better than any member of his Court. But nowadays the *Menuet* is danced after the *Branle*.

Therefore, when the King has danced the first *Menuet*, he goes to his seat and every one sits down, for while His Majesty is dancing all stand. Then the Prince who is to dance next, after His Majesty is seated, makes him a very profound bow, and then goes to the Queen or the first Princess of the Blood, and together they make the same bows as before the dance. Afterwards they dance the *Menuet*, and at the conclusion make the same bows again. Then the Lord makes a very low bow to the Princess on leaving her, because she will not appear again before the King.

But if His Majesty desire another dance to be performed, one of the First Gentlemen of the Bed Chamber announces his wish, which does not prevent the same bows being observed.

Pierre Rameau, *The Dancing Master* [1725], trans. Cyril Beaumont (London: C. W. Beaumont, 1931), 37–39.

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Rationalistic Distaste for Opera

The French were skeptical of the whole idea of opera during its first century. They possessed a glorious and very intellectualized spoken drama, compared to which the Italian *dramma per musica* seemed a kind of child's babble, in which verisimilitude was impaired, credibility made difficult, and the emphasis placed not on the content of the play but on decorative trappings. Music was admitted to their theaters mainly in an incidental capacity, on a par with the spectacular "machines" on which gods descended or winged chariots took off. And as the great French dramatist Pierre Corneille (1606–84) makes clear in the preface to his *Andromède* (1650), a *pièce à machines*, the machines were far more integral to his conception of that sort of play than the music that accompanied them.

Each act, and the prologue as well, has its own set, and at least one flying machine, with a musical accompaniment which I have only used in order to entertain the ears of the spectators while their eyes are engaged in watching the descent or ascent of a machine, or are focused on something (like the fight between Perseus and the monster) which would prevent their paying attention to what the actors might be saying. But I have been very careful to have nothing sung that is essential to the understanding of the play, since words that are sung are usually understood poorly by the audience, owing to the

confusion caused by the music. I make for a great obscurity in the audience anything of importance in this play are anything but play, and are so necessary to the whole edifice to tumble.

Pierre Corneille, *Œuvres complètes*.

Opera in French made its debut in Cambert (c. 1628–77) and his isolated works, such as *Le Menteur*, published until the next century. The native one that found favor in the countries were nowhere else. Frenchman, the courtier of Louis de Saint-Évremond (1613–40). St.-Évremond gives a virtuous life he raises have bedeviled d

I have long had a desire to tell you of it, at the Duchess's request, therefore I will gratify it in this manner.

I shall begin with great pleasure. Comedies in music, such as *Le Menteur*, their magnificence; the Machine of the places, is charming; the whole of me also, that this Wonderfull machine there the Senses must of necessity be the eyes are taken up, and are directed to the same object. In the beginning of the play and amidst all the varieties of the plot escapes us. But 'tis not long before else to our ears but a confused noise. Is it possible to avoid being bored by singing, nor the agreeable effect of the wherein it finds nothing to afford us in vain expected to be entertained. Dissatisfied that it has nothing to offer everyone wishes himself out of the spectators, is the hope that the

The reason why, commonly, any which appeared not to me the poetry. Now it is in vain to be satisfied; for my soul being in struggles against the impression of agreeable consent to them, will not afford me any great pleasure.