

Program Notes

The music of 16th century France was influenced by the religious/political, social and technological world in which it was created. Our program of 16th and 17th century French song (chansons) and dances is a case in point.

The invention of the printing press in the late 15th century had a dramatic effect on the accessibility of music. Publishers such as Pierre Attaignant in Paris, Tielman Susato and Christopher Plantin in Antwerp, Ottaviano Petrucci in Venice, Jacques Moderne in Lyons and Pierre Phalèse in Louvain turned out many collections of chansons, motets, masses, psalms and dances. Many of these collections were aimed at amateur performers.

Patronage, particularly of the French court, supported poets and musicians. François I of France, for example was both a poet and patron and granted printing privileges to Attaignant and other publishers. However, the religious unrest between the Catholics and the Protestant Huguenots often forced composers and musicians to flee to another part of France or to Italy, when the power of one group or the other rose or fell.

French song, in the early part of the 16th century, inherited the Franco-Flemish imitative polyphonic tradition of the 15th century. Examples of this style in our program are Mouton's "**Le berger et la bergère**," d'Hesdin's "**S'il est a ma poste**," Crequillon's "**Pour ung plaisir**" and "**Si des haulx cieulx**" and Lupi's "**Susanne un jour**". Josquin des Pres, recognized as the most important early Renaissance composer, represents the transition between the early and later styles of chanson. His complex melismatic counterpoint gives way to simpler melodic and more homophonic phrases, with a close relationship to the text, which is heard in his "**Mille regretz**."

Later in the century a new generation of poets, including Clément Marot, François I, Jean-Antoine de Baïf and Pierre de Ronsard, brought their influence to bear on a new style of chanson, the "Parisian" chanson. These poets, and the composers who set their work, were interested in the concept of "musique mesurée", an attempt to re-create the ethos of ancient Greece. This new style of chanson is more narrative and programmatic, and is characterized by a unity of the text and the music. The texture is for the most part homophonic, with all of the parts moving together, and with an emphasis on melody. Examples of "Parisian" chansons on our program include LaGrotte's "**Demandes tu**", the anonymous "**Chose commune**", Certon's "**La, la la**" and Janequin's "**A ce joli mois**" and "**Ce mois de may**". Claude Le Jeune's "**Revey venir dū printans**" is especially interesting. A unifying refrain is heard after each verse, and each verse adds another accompanying instrument.

Publishers put out collections of dances as well as chansons. We have included a group of French dances from Michael Praetorius' "Terpsichore". This collection was the only secular work of this German composer. These simple, four-square pieces go along with the development of families of instruments - viols, recorders, krumphorns and others - which cover the SATB ranges of the dances.

The second part of our program moves to yet another generation. This period, beginning in the mid-17th century, represents the early Baroque style. Melody is supported by a bass line, while the other lines fill out the harmony. Instrumental music was strongly influenced by the dance, and we begin with Charpentier's "**Dance suite in A minor**" - his most notable secular instrumental work. Moulinié's "**Fantasia**" and Lalande's "**Quator**" also feature dance rhythms. Lully, who was a dancer as well as a composer at the French court, wrote his "**March for the Ceremony of the Turks**" as part of his ballet "Bourgeois Gentilhomme".

We have also included a duo for 2 bass viols by Sainte-Colombe, who was a performer as well as a composer, and recently made famous by the 1991 film "Tous les matins du monde". He taught the famous Marin Marais and is credited with adding a 7th string to the bass viol.

Mary Benton