

THE EFFECTS OF THE REVOLUTION ON THE ORGAN MASS IN FRANCE

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The purpose of this study is to discover the effect that the revolution had on the organ mass in France. The organ mass had been a tradition in the Roman Catholic church since the 15th century.

The parts of the mass set were the chant Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei sections of the Ordinary. The purpose of the organ in the mass was to provide music to alternate with the sun chant. This is known as alternatim practice. The Kyrie consists of three sections, each section containing three versets. In all, nine versets would be performed. An example of how the versets might be executed follows:

Kyrie eleison: choir-organ-choir
Christe eleison: organ-choir-organ
Kyrie eleison: choir-organ-choir

By the time François Couperin (1668-1733) composed his organ masses, alternatim treatment of the Ordinary had long been a tradition of the church. The two that Couperin composed were his first published compositions (1690). He was organist at St. Gervais in Paris and was one of the first organists for the Royal chapel of Louis XIV at Versailles. His father, an organist, died when François was eleven. Because of the boy's talent, his father's organ post was promised to him when he reached the age of eighteen. Couperin was well known and respected as a composer and organist.

That only two organ masses were published by Couperin attests to the fact that organists in France customarily improvised music during the mass. That tradition had long preceded Couperin and is still in existence today. The *Messe pour les paroisses* and *Messe pour les convents* enable us to understand what the music was like. In the 17th century, the versets in published organ masses often were titles with traditional French registrations. Included among the titles in the *Messe pour les convents* are *Plein jeu*, *Petite fugue sur le Chromhorn*, *Recit de Tierce* and *Dialogue sur la Voix humaine*. These registrations would have been standard on baroque organs in France. The chant, although still in use in the 17th century, could not be as clearly detected in the music. Other changes in the organ mass were the addition of fugues to be used as versets and organ solos of the Offertory.

Ceremonials, issued by the church, dictated the use of chant in the mass. Although the procedures or "ceremoniales" differed, they were attempting to keep the focus on the chant and the mass. In 1668, the Paris diocese published the *Caeremoniale Parisiense*. According to the document, the chant was to appear unaltered for the first and last Kyrie versets, the chant must appear in parts of the Gloria, and it must appear in the first versets of the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. Many churches had their own local customs and ceremonies and ignored the dictum. Couperin's *Messe pour les convents* is freely composed, not based on a previously existing chant.

With the death of Couperin's employer, Louis XIV in 1715, there began a weakness in the monarchy and unrest in the people that foreshadowed the revolution. In 1790, Julian Offroy de la Mettrie wrote that the pleasures of the senses are what is important in life and that people should spend their lives in this pursuit. This philosophy is based on the third century philosopher, Epicurus' beliefs. Offroy de la Mettrie was attacked for being a materialist and was forced to live out his life in Berlin. His banishment was an early example of the growing intolerance of the self-indulged, extravagant monarchy. Jean Jacques Rousseau's book, *The Social Contract*, was written in 1762. The anti-monarchist sentiment of the book appear almost

thirty years before the fall of the Bastille, In his book he writes that "man is born free, yet everywhere is in chains" (1, 265). It is ironic that in the same year the book was written, a blatant display of extravagance given by the king to his mistress, the "Le Petit Trignon" was built.

On July 14, 1789, commoners in France, under the rule of Louis XVI (1754-1793) stormed the Bastille. To the people, the prison was a symbol of the repression they had suffered under the absolutist monarchy. In the many peasant uprisings that followed, the nobility and clergy were forced to relinquish their rights. One year after the fall of the Bastille, the church was forced into complete subordination to the state with the clergy required to take an oath of loyalty to it. With the revolution in France there came dramatic changes in the church and church music.

Out of fear of foreign invasion, the Convention, the governing body responsible for beheading the king, introduced the "Worship of a Supreme Being" as a replacement for the church. Political heroes replaced saints, and the churches became "Temples of Reason". Until Napoleon Bonaparte, there were many failed attempts at governing the war-torn country. Napoleon forced the abdication of Pope Pius VI and negotiated the Concordant of 1801 with the new pope, Pius VII. The concordant reestablished the church in France and acknowledged that only the one true church could establish a government. Napoleon resumed paying the clergys' salaries and guaranteed freedom of worship. He still insisted on the loyalty oath and the right to nominate new bishops. Symbolic of the loss of power that the church has suffered, Napoleon crowned himself emperor, in the presence of the pope.

During the revolution, there was a suppression of the choir schools, which provided the main centers of training for church musicians. Organ classes at the Ecole Royale de Chant were stopped altogether. This resulted in a lack of trained musicians after the close of the war. In 1818, organ was added to the classes at the Paris Conservatory, beginning once again the training of new organists. During the war, the Conservatory functioned primarily as a school to train military bands. When the churches were transformed into auditoriums for civic meetings, places for festivals and "Temples of Reason", the role of the organist drastically changed. The music required had to be programmatic and pleasing to the general public. Organists intent on keeping their positions and protecting their instruments, accommodated the new situations.

An organist who found himself unable to follow the trends of his time was Alexander Pierre François Boëly. Born in 1785, he received his earliest training in music from his father. He was surrounded by music at Versailles, where his father was employed until the revolution.

Boëly did not conform to the ideals of his time. In church, standard had changed, becoming more secularized. "The practice of playing gigue and pieces depicting the hunt during the mass had been introduced in the 18th century" (2, 6-7). Riley writes of him as a pioneer among the French in studying the works of Bach and in developing the pedal skills to play his organ works; he was years ahead of his contemporaries as an ardent student of Beethoven; [and] he reached back in French history to study the works of Couperin that had been forgotten by most musicians" (3, 46-50). His musical style was considered boring and was fired from his organ position at St. Germain L'Auxerrois in 1851. Boëly's *Messe des fêtes solennelles* contains versets for the Kyrie and Gloria. The titles represent the the text to the liturgy that the verset is replacing.

Throughout the music, alternative versets are offered to the organist. The versets from the Gloria are entitled:

Et in terra pax du 4e ton
Glorificamus te
Domine Deus, Rex Coelestis

Domine Deus
Quoniam tu solus

In contrast to the reactionary Boëly was Louis-James Lefébure-Wély (1817-1870). An early student at the Conservatory, he was a popular musician and was known for his improvisational skills and for composing pieces in a light-hearted quality, as evidenced in his 'Sortie' from his *L'Organiste Moderne*. In entertaining his audiences, Lefébure-Wély exemplified the role of organ music away from strictly liturgical purposes to a source of secular entertainment.

The effect of the revolution on the Organ Mass can be seen in many ways. Composers such as Couperin and Boëly composed their music with alternatim practice in mind. Couperin's death almost sixty years before the revolution protected him from the demands placed on liturgical composers during the revolution. Boëly tried to keep a failing tradition intact while Lefébure-Wély chose to cater to what was considered acceptable in post-revolutionary France. In the cases of all three composers, we are fortunate that they published examples of the Organ Mass. There is not a great amount of French liturgical organ music left us due to the highly developed art of improvisation so well ingrained in the musicians. The study of this music cannot help but make us wonder what effect government and society influences composition today.

Works Cited

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