RHYTHM, WORDS, AND MUSIC IN FRENCH CLASSIC ORGAN MUSIC

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Efforts to recreate performances of French Classic organ music generally focus on certain mechanical details: ornamentation, registration, fingering, etc. In this article we go one step further by exploring the textual premises of selected works and their effect on the music. We are not referring here to free versets, or suites of pieces grouped by mode, but only to those versets which bear a specific liturgical designation—music intended to replace a precise fragment of text during the Mass or Offices. Furthermore, we are not looking at the character or style of the piece as it relates to the words, since the music abounds in pictorialisms of this type. Rather, we wish to point out an aspect of the music routinely overlooked, that is, how an instrumental verset is sometimes closely patterned on a text not printed in the music.

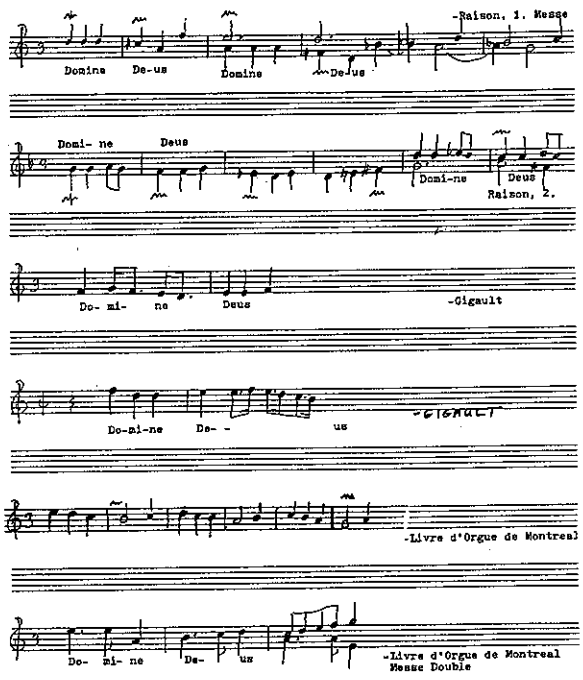
The composer may choose to acknowledge the text by inventing a head motif that imitates the natural accentuation of the text, assigning short notes to short syllables and long notes to long syllables. A word such as "Ag-nus," with accent on the first syllable, would be set with a long note followed by a short note. Keep in mind that the text was not present in the organ music, yet composers instinctively chose themes of a decidedly vocal character. Remember that in the 17th century instrumental music was still considered inferior to vocal compositions. Historically, all the earliest instrumental music took its form from vocal music, and it was only in the 16th century that instrumental music took on an independent profile. Think of the instrumental canzona and its roots in the Franco-Flemish chanson. The instrumental form still retained certain qualities of the vocal model: a clear texture and an opening rhythm ♩ ♩ ♩ usually on the same pitch. Renaissance composers were primarily interested in vocal composition and in a clear and even delivery of the text. The Council of Trent was particularly adamant on the subject of text when proposing church music reforms (1545–63). They urged widescale revision of chant syllabification in accordance with classical declamation, and ordered that melismas which obscured the text be reduced or omitted altogether. The organist's duty was to set forth the cantus firmus clearly and audibly without alteration or mutation of any kind.[1] In 1562, an important memorandum was presented at the Council which recommended that the text be spoken during the playing of organ versets.[2] The Ceremoniale of Clement VIII (1600) required the text to be sung or spoken, an injunction repeated throughout 17th-century church legislation.[3] Some organists sang the cantus firmus, such as Juan Bermudo in Spain, organist to Louis XII.[4] Other churches, we are told, ignored the requirement, or recited the text silently. Without a doubt, the practice must have created confusion, for Nivers complained in the late 17th century of the noise in the church from people reciting the text of the organ verset while he was playing.[5]

The compositional style of the High Renaissance motet lingered well into the 17th century. The organ works of Titelouze resemble sacred motets in every regard from the range of the voices to the controlled use of melismas and idiomatic keyboard figurations. The composer expressed little regard for the relation of words to music, meaning he lauded the cool, unemotional motet style rather than the chromatic Italian experiments. Clearly, though, Titelouze was very concerned with careful text underlay. Indeed, the plainchant melody could well have been sung by the organist as he played Titelouze's versets. The preface to the organ works states that if an interval is too large for the player, he may sing the missing inner voices, as all the parts were conceived vocally.[6] The friendship between Titelouze and Marin Mersenne, the French theorist, is well known. Mersenne's ideas on instrumental music, thoroughly in keeping with Renaissance views, sound somewhat extreme today. Chapter 36 of his *Musurgie universalis* explains how organ pipes can pronounce consonants, syllables, and voice inflections when properly "voiced."[7] The organ was supposed to imitate the human voice, and organists were to play in a manner that imitated the singer.

During the 17th century the divisions between vocal and instrumental music became clearer. Organ works written in the harpsichord idiom, imitating the viola da gamba, trumpet, hunting horns, or other popular instruments of the day, became commonplace. Furthermore, pieces specifically modeled after the new vocal styles in opera *récits* were also played on the organ. These organ *récits* are generally prefaced with explicit instructions on how to make the melody sing, such as "In all these things one must consult the singing methods, because in these pieces the organ must imitate the voice" (Nivers, 1665) or "The *dessus de Cromorne* is played sweetly and agreeably, imitating the singing style" (LeBègue, 1676). This article looks at those late 17th-century organ versets that have retained the Renaissance idea of vocal music in which the text is carefully matched to the notes. Strict rules regarding text underlay were summarized by Zarlino in his *Institutioni harmoniche,* (first ed., 1558). Of Zarlino's ten rules, five are listed below.

1. Long and short syllables should be combined with notes or figures of corresponding value, "so that no barbarism be heard."
2. A dot augmenting a note should not be given a new syllable.
3. A syllable must be given to a note, whatever its value, at the beginning of a piece or of a passage after a rest.
4. The last syllable must coincide with the last note.
5. Only one syllable should be sung to a ligature.[8]

To be sure, the Baroque composer disregarded many of Zarlino's rules, but what is interesting to observe are the many cases in which composers sought to preserve this outdated technique in the instrumental verset. Shown here are examples from the organ literature of motifs which appear to be derived from the text. "Domine Deus, Agnus Dei," the text from the Gloria of the Mass, is frequently set in a triple meter to accommodate the three syllables in "Domine" and place a fresh accent on "Deus." A few composers who used duple meter begin with a rest to achieve the same end. Additional examples from the Ordinary include a verset on "Et in terra pax" (Gloria), Kyrie, and "Benedictus" (Sanctus).



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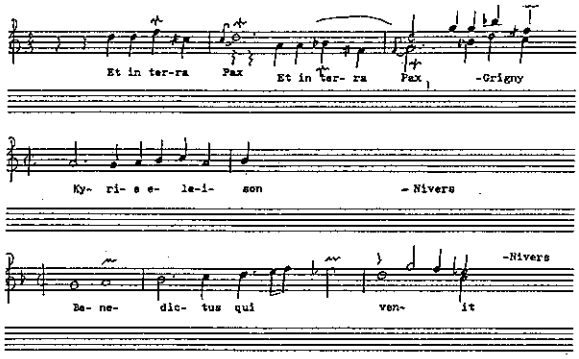
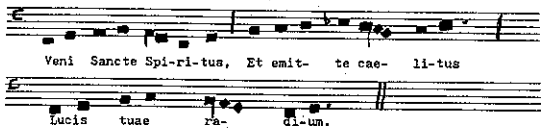
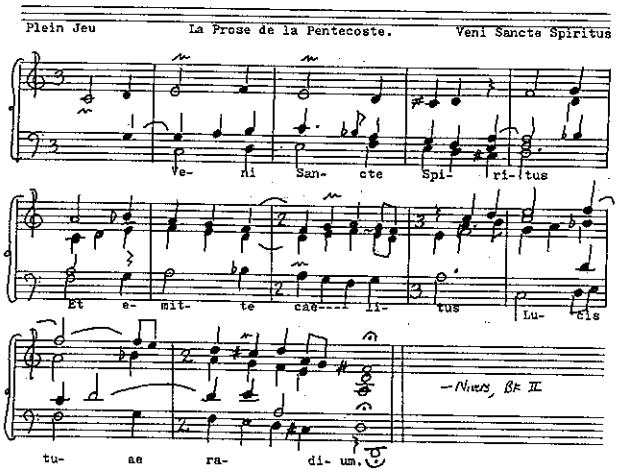


VERSETS WITH UNUSUAL METER CHANGES

Some organ music contains curious shifts in meter for no apparent reason. The music of Nivers and Raison, for example, may have a single measure in duple meter amidst a triple meter verset, or feature regular shifts between duple and triple every few measures. Apropos the previous discussion of texted organ versets, we can again look at the text for an explanation.

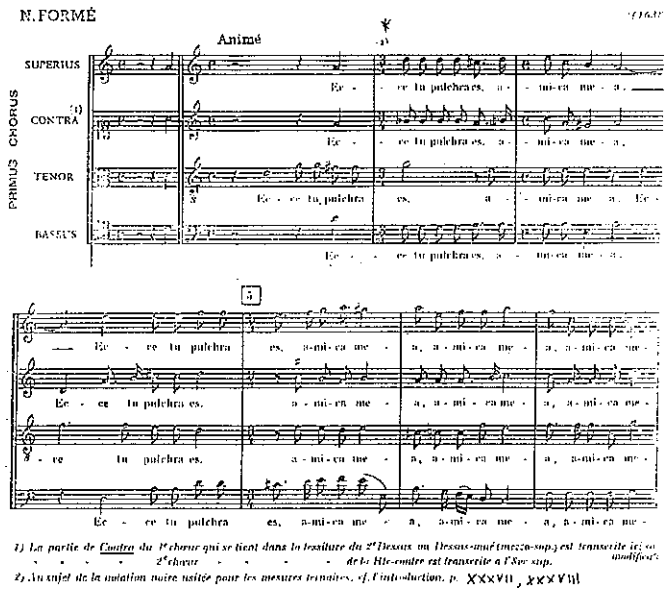
Consider Nivers's Pentecost Sequence for organ in Book II, "Veni Sancte Spiritus."





The organ versets alternate with sung chant and have the corresponding portion of chant in the bass line. Usually, when a cantus firmus is present in French organ music, the chant appears in long notes of equal value, but not in this case. The piece begins in triple meter with the chant moving by half notes and quarters. Although just twelve bars in length, two measures switch to duple meter (mm. 8 and 12). By underlaying the missing text we begin to see Nivers's rationale. The chant has been put into long and short note values to correlate with syllable length. Each syllable gets one note except for "Spiritus" and "Lucis" and "Caelitus" and "Radium," the two measures in duple meter. With "Lucis" it is easy to see that Nivers simply added a passing note for a smoother bass line. But why aren't the other words syllabic? Comparing the chant we find that the other three words were in ligature and melismatic. Nivers, therefore, preserved the contour of the chant and also Zarlino's rule about putting a single syllable under a ligature. Clearly, it was more important to Nivers to keep the text intact and change meter than to stick to a strict triple meter throughout. Another important issue can be found behind Nivers's thinking. The style of French music was inherently flexible, and meter shifts imitated the freedom of vocal music. Consider the supple rhythms of the *vers mesurée* or *air de cour*. Bar lines appeared sporadically, and then only as a visual aid to keep soprano and bass together.[9] The experiments of the Pleiades poets and musicians elevated the text to new heights in music. The early 17th-century motets by Bouzignac, Formé, and others are good illustrations of how the text determined the meter. This example by Nicolas Formé shows alteration of duple and triple meter for the sake of clear declamation of the text.

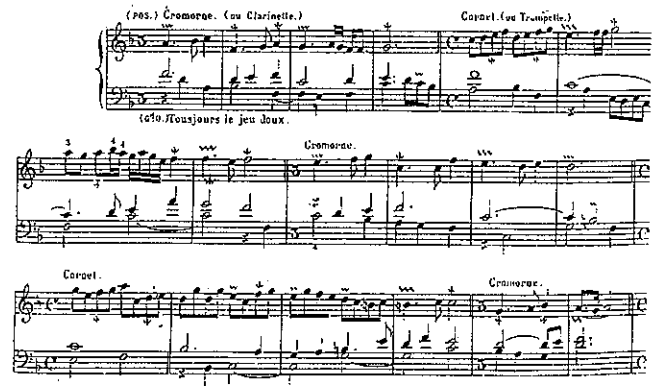
19. Ecce tu pulchra es



1) La partie de Contra du 1er chœur qui se tient dans la tessiture du 2d Dessus ou Dessus-mué/mezzo-sup.) est transcrite ici en 2e chœur de la Hte-contre est transcrite à l'Suc sup. modifiée

2) Au sujet de la notation noire usitée pour les mesures ternaires, cf. l'introduction, p. XXXVII, XXXVIII

The original notation used blackened ligatures to indicate the rhythmic compression from 4/4 to 3/4, as is correctly transcribed in Launay's edition.[10] Curiously, similar shifts in meter appear in contemporary organ music, even though the textual basis for the shifts are lacking. In Raison's "Tu solus altissimus" from Mass VI, there are 17 changes of meter in a piece just 34 bars long.



By Raison's own assertion, no chant melodies appear in his book of Masses. Therefore, independent of a chant, the Cromorne plays in triple meter and the Cornet responds in duple. The identity of the two sounds is vividly distinguished in much the same way that two opera singers would be typecast by timbre, mode, and affect. The same kind of writing can also be seen in Mass IV, "Dialogue." In other cases Raison will keep one meter throughout, but write in tempo changes from one registration to a contrasting registration. Nivers's "Duo" from Book III indicates one registration throughout, but numerous meter changes. While it is true that bass and descant melodies are in dialogue in this piece, there seems to be no textual basis to change meter. What could be the reason for these mercurial affectations except to invoke rhythmic freedom found in vocal

music? The composers are imitating the opera *récit*, its precursor, the *air de cour*, and the faithfulness to text found in the French motet.

It is hoped that an awareness of ties to the text (present or not) will give the modern player a respect for the essentially vocal origins of this music. Definitely, there are organ pieces which mimic instrumental idioms: harpsichord, viola da gamba, trumpet, etc, but they represent only one side of the literature.

NOTES

1. K.G. Fellerer, "Church Music and the Council of Trent," *The Musical Quarterly*, xxxiv (1953), pp. 586–92.
2. Edward Higginbottom, *The Liturgy and French Classical Organ Music*. Dissertation, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 1978, p. 54.
3. Benjamin Van Wye, "Ritual Use of the Organ in France," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, xxxiii (1980), p. 302.
4. Yvonne Rokseth, *La musique d'orgue au XVème siècle et au début du XVIème*. Dissertation, University of Paris, 1930, p. 166.
5. G.-G. Nivers, *Dissertation sur le chant gregorien*, date (?), p. 114.
6. Titelouze, preface to *Hymnes de l'Eglise*, 1623, p. 5. ". . . lesquelles parties l'on pourroit, non seulement extraire, mais aussi les chanter parce qu'ils ont leur chants distingués . . ."
7. Discussed in Mario Tiella's article, "Renaissance and Baroque Musical Instruments and Their *pronuntia*," *The Organ Yearbook* 15: 1984.
8. As quoted in Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1959), p. 378.
9. Albert Cohen, "A Study of Notational and Performance Problems of an Early Air de cour, *Je voudrois bien, ô Cloris* (1629) by Antoine Boësset (c. 1586–1643)," *Notations and Editions: A Book in Honor of Louise Cuyler*, ed. Edith Borroff (Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Publ., 1974), p. 55.
10. Denise Launay, *Anthologie du Motet Latin* (1609–1661), Publications de la Société française de musicologie, first series, xvii (1963).

ORGAN PEDAGOGY AND THE ROMANTIC SPIRIT OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The following address was delivered at the Fifth AGO National Conference on Organ Pedagogy in Worcester, Mass., June 24, 1990.

At first or second glance, or even at tenth or 15th glance, the threads that bind organ pedagogy to the Romantic Spirit of the 19th century seem tenuous at best. Neither the Kantian imperatives nor Hegel's theses and antitheses would appear, even to the informed observer, to have more than the most limited application in illuminating the mysteries of heel-toe pedaling, legato touch, or cross-bar phrasing. In truth, of course, even the closest scrutiny will fail to reveal the presence of a relationship where none inherently exists.

On the other hand, so pervasive was the Romantic Spirit in the 19th century that it is not unreasonable to think that even organ pedagogy should have remained unaffected by it. In the first place, music lay at the very core of Romanticism, with sacred music as its pulse beat. Music was the great universal religion of the Romantics, and the musician its annointed priest. Why then should any aspect of an art so integrally bound up with the spirit of its time be immune to its influence? Clearly, it should not, and consequently I think it may be worthwhile to explore, if only briefly, the impact of the Romantic Spirit on organ pedagogy: first, to determine in what ways it manifested itself; secondly, to see how it affected the development of the literature for the instrument; and, thirdly, to ascertain whether any lessons may be drawn from these matters which might serve a useful purpose today.

Among the many innovative phenomena which mark the latter half of the 18th century, one had direct and far-reaching implications for the development of organ music in the 19th century. Specifically, I have in mind the startling increase in the number of musical textbooks and tutors published between 1750 and 1800. On the face of it there was nothing new or novel about textbooks as such, and certainly there was no scarcity of them in the early years of the 18th century. Nonetheless, in the Golden Ages of Reason and the Enlightenment, with their emphasis on progress and their faith in the perfectability of man, it could reasonably be expected that the textbook would play a particularly vital role as a didactic vehicle. And so it did, but here a distinction should be made between textbook and tutor, although this distinction became marked only at a somewhat later time.

On the one hand, the authors of the theoretical texts—whether Kircher in the 17th century or Kirnberger in the 18th—could presume a relatively sophisticated audience for their works; counterpoint and composition are academic disciplines, where mastery is developed through intellectual endeavor, by learning and applying certain fundamental rules and principles.

The practical tutors, on the other hand, were written for those who wanted to learn to perform, and consequently their authors had to direct themselves to an audience sometimes radically different in its musical and intellectual orientation. The principal aim of the tutors was to show *how* rather than *why*, and in both style and language they were governed by the need to be clear and direct.

Between 1737 and 1784 Michel Corrette, the French organist and composer, produced some 17 tutors for an entire galaxy of instruments, from the harpsichord to the hurdy-gurdy, from the violin and guitar to the flûte à bec.

In Germany no similar single figure dominated the field, but several of the authors of instrumental tutors were among the most distinguished musicians of the day. The appearance of not one, but several major tutors, all within the space of about a decade in mid-century was wholly without parallel. Simply to cite the most eminent, there was Marpurg's method for the clavier in 1750, Quantz's method for the flute in 1752, C.P.E. Bach's treatise on the clavier in 1753 and 1762, and Leopold Mozart's *Violinschule* in 1756. Only a few years later, in 1770, Altenburg wrote his great *Musikalische Trompeter- und Paukenkunst*. Roughly equal in importance were Daniel Gottlob Türk's book, *On the Most Important Duties of an Organist*, published in 1787, and his *Clavierschule*, in 1789, both of which have been recently translated.[1] Altogether, the number and quality of instrumental tutors that appeared in Germany in the second half of the 18th century was as amazing as it was unprecedented.

What had hitherto been the closely guarded terrain of professionals, who passed on the secrets of their skills in a carefully structured relationship, was now thrown open and revealed in minute detail for anyone who wanted to learn to play an instrument and had the money to purchase the book. This development may have represented an intent to broaden the base of musical activity in the general cultural life of the time, but it also clearly represented a breakdown in the venerable Guild system, according to which the admission of candidates was highly selective and the initiation process rigorously controlled. More to the point, however, it constituted a tacit acknowledgment that the artist-performer was no longer the privileged possessor of arcane truths.

Given the magnitude of this pedagogical shift, it is only natural to try to determine what caused it.

In the commentary to his facsimile-reprint edition of Türk's *Duties of an Organist*, Bernard Billeter offers one plausible explanation which might account for the organ tutors, but which does not apply in broader terms. Based on the premise that the second half of the 18th century was an era of general deterioration in the field of church music, he argues that it is "most often in these periods of decay that the significant textbooks are written, since oral instruction suffices during a time of prosperity, and only important principles are codified. But when good teachers and models become rare, the need arises for the transmission of even the most self-understood details."[2]

Billeter's assessment of the situation in church music in the latter half of the 18th century is certainly on the mark, but the preponderance of instrumental tutors that appeared during those years were for instruments other than the organ—there were, in fact, no more than a half dozen or so organ tutors recorded in the entire period. Equally, if not more important, the world of music, otherwise, flourished during the second half of the century: the works of Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, and countless other composers testify to the health and prosperity of secular music during these decades.