



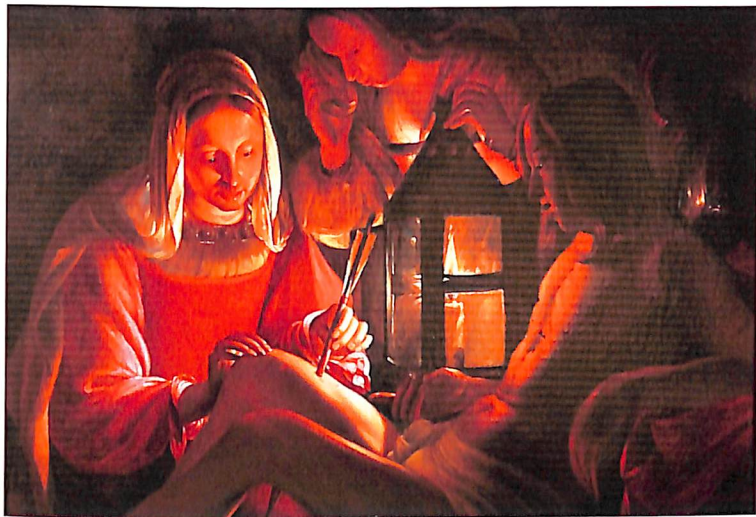
DDD

8.555936

Louis COUPERIN

Tombeau de M. de Blancrocher
Preludes • Pavane • Galliarde

Glen Wilson, Harpsichord



Louis Couperin (c.1626-1661)

Louis Couperin was born in Chaumes about the year 1626, the son of Charles Couperin, a versatile musician, tailor and merchant, who probably served as organist at the Benedictine Abbey in Chaumes. The sixth of eight children, Louis Couperin seems to have served as a notary's clerk in Chaumes-en-Brie between 1641 and 1645 and from 1646 in Beauvoir, and had his musical instruction from his father. In the early 1650s he and his two musician brothers, Charles and François, played an aubade at the château of the king's harpsichordist, Chambonnières, and it was through the latter that Louis Couperin was able to move to Paris. There he made an immediate impression on those who heard him and his meetings with the lutenist Charles Fleury, Sieur de Blancrocher, and the organist and composer Johann Jacob Froberger, whose music exercised a strong influence over his own work, proved fruitful. In April 1653 Louis Couperin was appointed organist at Saint-Gervais, a position that brought with it a residence in Paris. He rejected the offered position of royal harpsichordist out of deference to his patron Chambonnières, whose services at court were allegedly relinquished through his inability to accompany from a figured bass. Chambonnières was later able to sell the reversion of this position to d'Anglebert. Couperin was instead granted by the King the title of treble viol player in the royal musical establishment. He enjoyed the patronage of Abel Servien, *Surintendant des finances*, and spent time at the latter's château in Meudon. He died in Paris on 29th August 1661, leaving his property to his brothers, who lived with him in the Saint-Gervais organist's house. An agreement between the two surviving brothers allowed them to share the principal property, the compositions of Louis Couperin, to which they both now had equal access. Charles Couperin, the youngest of the brothers and father of the most famous musician in the family, the younger François, later known as *le grand*, succeeded Louis as organist at Saint-Gervais. The older François seems to have earned a living as a teacher, the length of his lessons corresponding to the amount of wine supplied, and as an occasional deputy to his brother and nephew.

Keith Anderson

Selected Harpsichord Works

The French equivalent to Bach in its connotation as "musical dynasty" is *Couperin*. For over two hundred years the family played major rôles in musical life in the Île-de-France, and a branch even reached the court of Turin. Most music-lovers know something about François Couperin "*Le grand*", but there are those who think the accolade ought to go to his uncle Louis. The corpus of his surviving works is minuscule, compared to that of his nephew, and consists almost exclusively of brief movements for keyboard, but in a few short bars, he often achieves a synthesis between boldness and balance, between grace and grandeur, and between emotional depth and economy of means, which puts him firmly in the first rank of seventeenth-century composers.

It is the last-named quality, his compositional thrift, which has placed him outside the purview of listeners looking for a sensuous wallow in kaleidoscopic sound. Louis Couperin demands an initiate's complete submission to the mysterious laws of pure musical utterance. Georges de la Tour, born about the same time as Couperin's father Charles, is a visual parallel, but the painter profits from our age's intensely visual orientation, whereas man's ability to "unconsciously count" (Hume) in the language of music seems to be rushing towards extinction.

Couperin's supposed difficulty as a composer culminates in the sixteen "unmeasured" preludes, noted in whole notes only, without barlines. These pieces have their roots in improvisation, but are highly crafted. There is clear rhythm here, and even metre, if the player can find them. That task is complicated by the poor quality of the two manuscript copies, made at an unknown number of removes from the lost autograph, in which they are preserved. The printing of keyboard music was prohibitively expensive in Louis Couperin's day, and that, and his early death, help to account for his relative anonymity. Such preludes common in France for about seventy years were compared at the time to 'musical prose', as opposed to the metered dance movements that make up the majority of his extant harpsichord works. Puzzled listeners are gently advised not to worry too much about 'understanding' the *Préludes non mesurés*. If you hear them repeatedly, you will begin to sense a kind of subterranean tempo, and the series of gestures will begin to cohere like an oration. You will soon find yourself profoundly moved.

The two sources mentioned above are large anthologies, loosely organised by key, with no trace of larger cyclical groupings. This recording is also grouped by key, with each key announced by a prelude. Three of the groups might be called 'suites', although the word is an anachronism, and no fixed order of dance movements existed in Couperin's day. Two of the longest preludes stand alone, and I have borrowed a title for them, *Toccade*, from a similar piece by a composer of the next generation, Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre. They show the influence of *Toccatas* by Couperin's friend Froberger not only in the *hommage* of the A minor prelude's title, but also in the presence of a central fugue, their range of passionate declamation, and their expansive figuration.

The death of another friend is memorialised in the *Tombeau de M. de Blancrocher*. This famous lutenist fell down some stairs while inebriated and is said to have died in Froberger's arms. There may be another *Tombeau* on this disc, although it is not designated as such in the source. The F sharp minor *Pavane* is Couperin's only example of this obsolete form, often used for *Tombeaux*, *Lamentations* and the like, as well as his only piece in this bizarre key. The sense of inconsolable personal grief it so searingly conveys makes me wonder whether it was composed on the death of Charles Couperin *père* (1653), who had given Louis Couperin and two of his brothers such a thorough grounding in music, back at home in Chaumes-en-Brie.

Glen Wilson

Glen Wilson

Born in 1952 in the United States, Glen Wilson studied harpsichord and piano at the North Carolina School of the Arts and at the Juilliard School before moving to The Netherlands in 1971, where he studied at the Amsterdam Conservatory with Gustav Leonhardt for four years. Shortly before taking his Concert Diploma, he became the youngest member in the history of The Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, remaining until he was invited to teach at the Utrecht Conservatory in 1982. He had meanwhile won all three categories of the 1980 Bruges competition and embarked on a many-sided career as a soloist, in chamber music, and as broadcaster, that has since taken him to over thirty countries. He has been the duo partner of Emma Kirkby, Gustav Leonhardt, Michael Chance, Alice Hamoncourt, Carolyn Watkinson, Peter Kooy and Wieland Kuyken, was a member of Quadro Hotteterre, founded the Amsterdam Fortepiano Trio with Lucy van Dael and Wouter Möller, and participated in major recordings of the orchestras of Brüggem, Leonhardt, and Hamoncourt. He currently performs with the Dutch gambist Mienieke van der Velden. A series of seven solo recordings for Teldec/Das Alte Werk and numerous chamber music releases established Wilson's reputation as a leading early keyboard specialist. In 1988 he accepted a Professorship at the Musikhochschule in Würzburg. He recently published his reconstruction of the lost autograph of Louis Couperin's *Préludes non mesurés*. Glen Wilson was the long-time harpsichordist of The Netherlands Opera. He made his début as conductor there with his own edition of Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno di Ulisse in Patria*. The production, with Anthony Rolfe-Johnson in the title rôle, received over fifty performances in an unprecedented four seasons at Amsterdam, where it was filmed for television, and was invited to New York, Los Angeles, and Sydney, where it opened the Sydney Festival in 1999.

Louis Couperin, uncle of François Couperin *Le grand*, boasts a musical achievement that rivals that of his nephew, in quality, if not in quantity. His surviving works are principally short keyboard pieces that bear witness to his position as one of the leading French *clavécinistes* of his period.

Louis COUPERIN

(c.1626-1661)

Five Pieces in D		13:52	Six Pieces in C		11:24
1	Prélude	4:25	14	Prélude	2:29
2	Allemande	4:13	15	Allemande	3:10
3	Courante	1:17	16	Courante	1:13
4	Sarabande	2:10	17	Courante (croisée)	1:16
5	Gigue	1:47	18	Rigaudon et Double	1:21
			19	Gigue	1:54
6	Prelude (Toccade) in A minor, (After M. Froberger)	8:26	20	Prelude in A major	2:03
7	Prelude in F major	2:24	21	Pavane in F sharp minor	6:31
8	Tombeau de M. de Blancrocher in F major	5:29	22	Prelude (Toccade) in D minor	6:55
			23	Prelude in G major	0:57
Five Pieces in G minor		14:26			2:12
9	Prélude	2:25	24	Galliarde in G major	
10	Allemande	2:50			
11	Courante	1:50			
12	Sarabande	2:11			
13	Passacaille	5:11			

Glen Wilson, Harpsichord

Recorded in February 2001 in the sixteenth-century Schutt-Bau in Hofheim-Rügheim, Lower Franconia, on a copy of the 1628 harpsichord made by the Antwerp maker Johannes Ruckers the Younger (1578-1643)

Producer and Engineer: Jürgen Rummel • Booklet Notes: Glen Wilson and Keith Anderson

Glen Wilson has edited the 16 préludes non mesurés of Louis Couperin

for Breitkopf & Härtel (Edition Breitkopf 8705)

Cover painting: *St Sebastian tended by the Holy Woman* by Georges de la Tour (1593-1652)

(Private Collection/Bridgeman Art Archive, London)

NAXOS

DDD

8.555936

Playing Time
74:41



www.naxos.com

© & © 2003 HNH International Ltd.
Booklet notes in English
Made in Canada