

## Rameau's Minor Vocal Works

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### SONGS

Rameau's 'Lucas pour se gausser de nous', an *air à boire* for two voices and *basse continue* entitled 'Deux Paysans', heads Ballard's *Recueil d'airs sérieux et à boire* for February 1707<sup>1</sup>. Following on from the publication of Rameau's first harpsichord book a year earlier, it was the composer's first foray into vocal music.

'Lucas' is a stock peasant character in the *air à boire*. Rameau may have aimed to outdo Charles Piroye and Philippe Courbois, both of whom set a lyric featuring 'Lucas' in Ballard's *Recueil* for October 1705, 'Lucas fouloit le jus d'Automne'.<sup>2</sup> There, Lucas is depicted treading autumn grapes as Cupid descends all of a sudden with a retinue of other deities to pierce him with his arrow. Lucas declines Bacchus' offer of help by affirming that Cupid is only a gnat, to be drowned in his wineglass. That a *vigner* would be familiar with the classical deities and able to represent in witty metaphor how Cupid may be kept at bay, hardly rings true. In the anonymous lyric Rameau set to music, 'Lucas' is a more credible peasant:

Lucas pour se gausser de nous,  
Fait frême d'agasser notre jeune voiseine,  
Et palsangué, je voyons bian tretous, tretous,  
Qu'l n'en veut qu'à notre chopeine.  
Qu'il se trémousse avec Catin,  
Morgué, je n'en ferons pas meine;  
Mais s'il vianit goûter notre vin,  
Pour nous gausser de ly tapons sur sa bedeine,  
Tapons, morgué, tapons à grands coups de gourdin.<sup>3</sup>

In recounting the antics of Lucas and his companions, and mimicking their rustic pronunciation, antiquated oaths and bad grammar, owners of Ballard's songbooks could laugh at the underclass as they were enjoying their own tipple. Rameau depicted this little scenario with aplomb. His largely scalar setting of lines 1-7 which sets up the scene is devoid of word repeats except at 'chopeine', which the *dessus* festoons with an exaggerated melisma, and at 'se tremousse', which, as one might expect, the *dessus* and *basse* decorate in rhythmic unison. With lines 8-9 Rameau makes play of the speaker's threats of revenge. Until that point the *basse continue* largely shadows the *basse* singer, but for lines 8-9 he gives it an independent, hammering part, sounded against close imitation in the vocal parts, to represent the blows the hapless Lucas will receive if he crosses his companions. At the 'Deuxième Reprise' in the second section the blows accelerate as the formerly arpeggiated *basse continue* line breaks down into a series of descending scales.



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RE C U E I L D' A I R S  
S E R I E U X E T A B O I R E,  
D E D I F F E R E N T S A U T E U R S ;  
I M P R I M E ' A U M O I S D E F E V R I E R 1 7 0 7 .

A I R A B O I R É , D E M O N S I E U R R A M E A U .  
D E U X P A Y S A N S .

LUcas, pour se gausser de nous, fait frère d'agasser nôtre jeune Voisine,  
LUcas, pour se gausser de nous, B. - C. fait frère d'agasser nôtre jeune Voisine,  
D

Ballard, *Recueil d'airs sérieux et à boire*, février 1707, p. 23  
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Full of subtlety yet simple to sing, Rameau's humorous song about 'Lucas' was destined to become one of the song 'hits' of the *ancien régime*, for beside various later editions issued in Paris, the Hague, Liege and Amsterdam, over seventy manuscript copies of it can be identified.<sup>4</sup>

An attractive drinking song in the style of a gavotte, 'Non, non, le dieu qui sait aimer', and a serious air written from a woman's viewpoint, 'A l'objet que j'adore' which bears the title, 'L'Amante préoccupée', have a place amongst Rameau's minor vocal works because they are attributed to him in the beautiful D Mbs Mus Mss 1155.<sup>5</sup> Its copyist, Sylvestre, a professional based in Paris, dated the manuscript 1766, but Rameau could have composed these airs much earlier, for as Sylvie Bouissou points out, this source features works published in the first two decades of the century. The title of 'L'Amante préoccupée' may not have been Rameau's own, for titles encapsulating the subject of an air were often added to pre-existing airs in song collections such as the eight volumes of the *Nouveau recueil de chansons choisies*, a series of reprints from Parisian publications issued in the Hague between 1723 and 1743.

## CANONS

Rameau made one other contribution to Ballard's *Recueils d'airs sérieux et à boire* series. His canon, '[Avec du vin endormons-nous](#)', which brings the *Troisième Livre* of his *Traité de l'harmonie* (1722) to an end, had previously appeared in print as the final work in Ballard's *Recueil* for November 1719.<sup>6</sup> By then, Rameau was no doubt much preoccupied with his *Traité*, for a month later, Ballard recorded his thanks to the composer for undertaking a work of such 'méditation et de recherches exactes'; he, Ballard, had begun to print the work, projecting that it would be complete within six months.<sup>7</sup>

To be noted is that at least five of Rameau's seven canons predate his *Traité*. 'L'épouse entre deux draps', 'Je suis un fou' and 'Si tu ne prends garde à toi' were written by late 1720, since all three appear, albeit anonymously, in F-CSM/ Ms 282, a manuscript collection of canons copied by the Parisian *maître de musique* and copyist, C. La Serre. On the last page La Serre noted that he had completed his work on Saturday 7 December 1720.<sup>8</sup> Partly because of their technical difficulty, but also because their lyrics were often bawdy, canons of the period were printed only infrequently. It is pleasant to imagine not only the composer/copyist La Serre, but before him also Rameau, enjoying a

convivial moment singing ribald songs in the company of friends! 'L'épouse entre deux draps' was formerly thought to be the work of François Couperin, on the grounds that it is attributed to him in F-Pc/ Y 296 [1], a collection of drinking songs compiled for 'Mlle D.' in 1734. Its attribution to Rameau is secured by its presence in the important Decroix manuscript RMms/ Decroix. 3620 which comprises musical fragments found amongst Rameau's own papers.<sup>9</sup>

Of the three canons which Rameau incorporated into the *Troisième Livre* of his *Traité*, the simplest is '[Reveillez-vous, dormeur sans fin](#)'. Although composed for five voices, it illustrates what a beginner might aim to write, for it comprises just five bars of music. Rameau certainly intended it to be sung, for he demonstrates how it can be enlivened with a few simple ornaments ('notes de goût pour le chant'). As a further option, he breaks down its final long notes into semiquavers adding a nonsensical refrain portraying a clanging bell.

In contrast, both '[Avec du vin endormons-nous](#)', a canon for 3 voices at the fourth, and '[Ah loin de rire](#)', for 4 voices at the fifth, demonstrate contrapuntal writing of considerable complexity, for both are to modulate at each successive entry of their subject. The composer's purpose in these pieces was didactic. Rameau wanted to give budding composers an incentive for coming to grips with his theory of chordal harmony: 'L'on ne peut guères réüssir dans ces deux dernieres sortes de Canon que par une intelligence parfaite du Renversement...' (One can scarcely be successful with these last two types of canon without a complete understanding of inversions).

In 'Ah loin de rire', each statement after the first is to be sung a major third higher than its predecessor, while in 'Avec du vin endormons-nous' each successive statement is to be sung a major second lower than its predecessor. Correctly rendered, the music returns to the opening key after, respectively, three, or four statements of the subject. In 'Ah loin de rire', although the last note of the subject serves as the starting pitch of its next statement, the performers must negotiate disorienting chromatic inflections en route at the word 'Pleurons' (let us weep) without losing their way. 'Avec du vin' is a little easier to sing. Although its subject contains some awkward intervals, these very intervals, aided by functional accidentals to be sung en route, establish the modulation to the key of the ensuing statement. In this canon, the last note of the subject is correctly perceived as the leading note of the new key.<sup>10</sup>

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*CANON A LA QUARTE.*

Avec du  
Avec du vin, endormons-nous, endorm-  
Avec du vin, endormons-nous, endorm- nous- nous, en-  
vin, endormons-nous, endorm- nous- nous, endormons-nous.  
mons nous, endormons- nous, Avec du...  
dormons- nous...

Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Avec du vin, endormons-nous*, dans *Traité de l'harmonie*, Paris, Ballard, 1722, p. 362  
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## CANTATAS

The French cantata was an important avenue by which music in France became enriched through the importation of Italian stylistic elements in the early eighteenth century. Its purposeful combination of the liveliness of Italian music and the refinement of French music met with resistance from purists loathe to see French composers depart from the style of Lully, yet through the many works composed by Campra, Bernier, Stuck, Montéclair and Clérambault, to name its leading exponents in the first fifteen years of the century, the new mixed style, for which Couperin coined the term *les goûts-réunis*, won the day.

The cantata offered Rameau considerable scope for honing his skills in dramatic composition, for although they are modest in dimension, French cantatas are made up of quasi-dramatic ingredients. In their purest form, outlined by the major cantata poet Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, a narrator sets the scene, advances the plot and announces the dénouement, all in recitative. In the airs the protagonists tell of their emotional reactions to the unfolding action. If the cantata is for solo voice, the narrator doubles as protagonist. The final air proposes a moral from which the listener may take instruction, replicating the typical admonition with which a stage divertissement concludes. Rameau was to admit later that his cantatas had served him as apprentice-pieces.<sup>11</sup>

Of the nine cantatas whose attribution to Rameau is certain, seven have been preserved,<sup>12</sup> all but one composed between ca 1715 and 1729. According to the composer, *Aquilon & Orithie* and *Thétis*

circulated in manuscript with his blessing from about 1715, helping to make his name known in the provinces.<sup>13</sup> *Orphée*, *L'Impatience*, and *Les Amants trahis* may be contemporary with the preparation of the *Traité de l'harmonie*, as their primary sources are Parisian copies made in 1721. Rameau's only two cantatas published in his lifetime – *Cantates françaises*, Paris, l'auteur, Boivin, Leclerc, ca 1729 – were a revised version of *Aquilon & Orithie*, and a new work, *Le Berger fidelle*, which was performed at the Concert français by the opera singer Catherine-Nicole Le Maure on 22 November 1728.<sup>14</sup> These two works appeared in 1729 in an engraved collection subtitled 'LIVRE PREMIER'. No second book ever followed. Rameau's last cantata, the *Cantate pour le jour de la Saint-Louis*, of which the source is a manuscript in Rameau's own hand, was discovered by Mary Cyr in the late 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Robert Green has used evidence from the paper used by Rameau to show that, in spite of the maturity of its style as adjudged by Mary Cyr, Rameau wrote out the work between 1737 and 1741.<sup>16</sup>

Rameau kept largely to the standard movement sequence of three airs each preceded by a recitative (R-A-R-A-R-A) established by Morin, Bernier and Campra in the first decade of the century. An intriguing exception is *Les Amants trahis*, for two voices, dessus/ tenor, and bass: R-D-R-A-R-D-R-A-R-A-R-D, in which D stands for 'Duo'. This work, as a comic cantata something of a rarity, has no narrator. Two spurned lovers debate with each other how one should respond to rejection: should one laugh or weep? Their dialogue was no doubt inspired by Jean-Baptiste Stuck's Italianate *Héraclite & Democrite*, a debate on how one ought to evaluate human weaknesses, but Rameau's cantata is the more subtle.<sup>17</sup> Tircis' first air, 'Echo, combien de fois ai-je su vous instruire' (Echo, how often have I confided in you), adopts the binary form and the musical style of many an *air sérieux* in Ballard's *Recueils*, but Tircis is not allowed to complete his amorous complaint; in a comic departure from songbook convention, he is cut short by Damon's declaration that he wants to invite Echo to laugh aloud on his behalf. While Stuck does not distinguish between his two philosophers very clearly with regard to their music, Rameau's first two duos expound the lovers' opposing views with cleverly divergent rhythms. Unlike Stuck's cantata, *Les Amants trahis* progresses dramatically. Since Damon (bass), the advocate of laughter, sings all but one of the airs, he contrives little by little to wear down Tircis's pessimism, and in the final duo they agree on positive action: 'C'est en oubliant la coquette/Qu'il faut chercher à s'en vanger' (It's by putting a coquette out of mind, that one sets out to take revenge on her).

Two of Damon's airs are accompanied by concertante bass viol, and the same instrument features also in Rameau's two other cantatas preserved in copies dated 1721. Rameau's well-developed instrumental accompaniments for violins in *Orphée*, *Aquilon et Orithie* and *Le Berger fidelle*, advance the development of string writing in the *gout-réunis* style of the 1720s, with a technical ingenuity and an accomplishment second to none.

The Feast of Saint-Louis, celebrated on 25 August in both court and city, traditionally paid homage to both King and saint. Rameau's *Cantate pour le jour de la Saint-Louis* presents an allegory in which, in the guise of 'Cloris', Marie Leszczynska pays tribute her husband. The words written for 'Cloris' are surprisingly personal, as she asks the god of poetry to help her to celebrate 'le nom de l'ami que j'adore;/ Ainsi que sur mon cœur, il règne dans ces lieux,/ Du beau nom de Louis que tout ici résonne' (the name of the beloved whom I adore;/ He reigns over this place, as over my heart; may all things sound forth Louis' fine name). The composer made provision for this cantata to be performed on occasions other than on the Day of St. Louis, by providing a supplementary movement to replace the final air if required.

A thread of gallic lightness runs through Rameau's minor vocal works, which are dotted across his pre-operatic career. Eager as a young man to shine before a wide audience, he presented music lovers with an amusing *air à boire* which instantly made his name as a composer sympathetic to vocal music in the French tradition. Although he wrote cantatas primarily in order to develop his text-setting skills and composing techniques in the *gouts-réunis* style as preparation for his hoped-for career as an opera composer, the result is a set of extremely enjoyable works. The comical *Les Amants trahis* has considerable originality. Even the most challenging of Rameau's canons partake of this quality of lightness, with their incongruously frivolous words.

## NOTES

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- \*. Greer Garden, Associate Professor at the New Zealand School of Music, is known for her work on the cantatas of André Campra and of Jean-Baptiste de Bousset, and an edited book, *La Délivrance de Renaud: ballet dansé par Louis XIII en 1617* (Brépols, 2010). Her critical edition of Bousset's motets (CMBV, 2011) followed her account of his activities as composer to the Academies (Cahiers Philidor 38). She is currently completing a catalogue of Bousset's works and a book on his songs.
1. Ballard, *Recueil d'airs sérieux et à boire*, février 1707, p. 23-26 ; see the manuscript copy of Versailles (F), Bibliothèque municipale/ MS mus. 123, pp. [158](#), [159](#), [160](#) et [161](#).
  2. Ballard, *Recueil d'airs sérieux et à boire*, octobre 1705, pp. 183-186.
  3. Lucas, to play a prank on us,/ Makes as if to be a nuisance to the young lady seated next to us, / But, Zounds, I notice that what he's really after /Is our bottle of wine./ Let him cavort with Catin all he likes, / By God's death, that won't bother me in the least;/ But if he manages to get a taste of our wine / To play a prank on him let's give his paunch a poke,/ By God's death, let's rain some jolly good blows on him.
  4. None of the authors whose texts Rameau set in his minor vocal works has as yet been identified. For possible attributions, and for a modern edition of the musical works discussed in this article, see Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Cantates, Canons, Airs, Opera omnia Rameau*, série III, volume 1 [OOR III. 1], ed. Jean-Paul Montagnier [cantatas] and Sylvie Bouissou [airs and canons], Kassel, Bärenreiter, 2008. On the sources of 'Lucas pour se gausser de nous' see pp. 243-246, and G. Garden, review of OOR III.1 in *Revue de Musicologie*, 96/2, 2010, p. 545-546. In the course of my own current search for manuscript copies of the songs of Jean-Baptiste de Bousset, I have so far uncovered over 50 further sources of Rameau's 'Lucas' to add to the 24 listed in OOR.III.1.
  5. OOR III.1, p. 230.
  6. Ballard, *Recueil d'airs sérieux et à boire*, novembre 1719, p. 222. On other sources of this canon, including the eight editions of Rameau's *Traité*, see OOR III.1, pp. 221-222.
  7. Sylvie Bouissou estimates that the writing of the *Traité* took place between November 1719 and 1722. OOR.III.1, p. XXIV.
  8. See Sylvie Bouissou, OOR III,1, p. 222.
  9. *Ibid.*
  10. Sylvie Bouissou presents Rameau's two modulating canons both in their cryptic form and in written out notation, in both cases prefacing each statement of their subject by the appropriate keysignature. She also demonstrates how a performance of each one can be brought to an end. OOR III.1, pp. 171-173; 176-179.
  11. Letter to the *Mercure de France*, juin 1765. See David Tunley, *The Eighteenth-Century French Cantata*, London, Denis Dobson, 1974, p. 172, note 9.
  12. Two cantatas were attributed in error to Joseph Bodin de Boismortier and Pierre de La Garde respectively in the 1897 edition of Rameau's *Oeuvres complètes*. OOR.III.1, p. XII, note 9.
  13. Letter from Rameau to Houdart de La Motte of 25 October 1727, quoted in OOR.III.1, p. XII.
  14. *Mercure de France*, novembre 1728, p. 2511, quoted in OOR.III.1, p. XIII, note 26.
  15. Mary Cyr, 'A Rameau discovery: Cantate pour le jour de la Saint Louis', *The Musical Times*, 1979, no 120, pp. 907-909. See also OOR.III,1, p. XIII, note 27.
  16. Thomas Richard Green, *Early Rameau Sources: Studies in the Origins and Dating of the Operas and Other Musical Works*, PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1992, pp. 731-732, quoted in OOR.III.1, p. XIII.
  17. Jean-Baptiste Stuck, *Cantates françaises [Livre III]*, Paris, Ballard, 1711, pp. 18-45. The connection between the two works was noted by David Tunley, *The Eighteenth-Century Cantata*, op.cit., p. 161.