

Operatic Virtuosity at the Keyboard: Claude Balbastre and Rameau's Legacy

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IN *THE PRESENT STATE OF MUSIC in France and Italy* (1773), Charles Burney offers his readers detailed descriptions of his meetings with French musicians. He lingers in particular on his day with Claude Balbastre (1724–1799), one of the last musicians in France to have enjoyed a career as a solo harpsichordist and organist before the French Revolution. Encountering Balbastre improvising during a service at the Église Saint-Roch, Burney recalled that

After church M. Balbastre invited me to his house, to see a fine Rucker [*sic*] harpsichord which he has had painted inside and out with as much delicacy as the finest coach or even snuff-box I ever saw at Paris. On the outside is the birth of Venus; and on the inside of the cover the story of Rameau's most famous opera, *Castor and Pollux*; earth, hell, and elysium are there represented: in elysium, sitting on a bank, with a lyre in his hand, is that celebrated composer himself; the portrait is very like, for I saw Rameau in 1764. The tone of this instrument is more delicate than powerful; one of the unisons is of buff, but very sweet and agreeable; the touch very light, owing to the quilling, which in France is always weak.¹

This sumptuous harpsichord still survives, though its current location is unknown in the wake of its sale by Sotheby's in 2005.² Its attribution to a member of the Flemish Ruckers family on the name batten cannot be confirmed. At some point during the eighteenth century, it underwent a *ravalement*: the case was redecorated and likely enlarged, the range of the keyboard expanded, and the action rebuilt.³ The most recent work on the instrument before Burney's visit was completed in 1767. Although Érard and Zeitter converted it into a fortepiano in 1874, much

¹ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy: or the Journal of a Tour through those Countries* (London: T. Becket and Co., 1773), 37–38.

² "A French Pianoforte Converted in 1874 by Erard and Zeitter..." (Sale 5310, Lot 22), *English and Continental Furniture: Part I* (London: Sotheby's, 2005), 58–59; and Laurence Libin, "A Rediscovered Portrayal of Rameau and 'Castor et Pollux,'" *Early Music* 11 no. 4 (Oct. 1983): 510–13.

³ The cultural significance of *ravalements* performed in France was the subject of my presentation, "Seeing Rubens, Hearing Ruckers: The Sonic Palette of the Franco-Flemish Harpsichord," delivered at the American Musicological Society's annual conference in 2014, and is developed in my forthcoming dissertation.



Figure 1: Balbastre's harpsichord at the time of its sale by Sotheby's in 2005, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2005/english-and-continental-furniture-part-i-the-mirror-sale-105310/lot.22.html>.

of the instrument's eighteenth-century decoration remains intact (Figure 1).⁴ The case decoration and what Burney called a "unison ... of buffle", more commonly known as a *peau de buffle*, indicates that the instrument almost certainly passed through the workshop of Pascal Taskin (1723–1793), a well-known harpsichord builder in Paris, who was so famous for his *peaux de buffle* that he was falsely credited with inventing the register.⁵ A piece of keyboard music is painted on a scroll on the name batten above the keyboard: it reads "Pastorale de Mr Balbastre le 6 Aoust 1767."⁶ The elaborate lid painting that so impressed Burney depicts Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) seated under a tree in Elysium near the tail of the instrument watching a scene from his own *tragédie lyrique*, *Castor et Pollux*. Florence Gétreau has suggested that the scenes from *Castor et Pollux* and the portrait of Rameau were painted by Pierre-Antoine Baudouin (1723–1769),

⁴ Libin, "A Rediscovered Portrayal of Rameau and 'Castor et Pollux,'" 510–13.

⁵ Libin argues that the *ravalement* of the harpsichord was probably done by Taskin, who was known for adding *peaux de buffle* to several harpsichords. Furthermore, in a private correspondence with Libin, Sheridan Germann identified the painter of the name batten as Monsieur Doublet, *père*, who frequently worked with Taskin.

⁶ Transcribed in Libin, "A Rediscovered Portrayal of Rameau and 'Castor et Pollux,'" 511.

who prepared the sets for the 1764 revival of *Castor* for the Académie Royale de Musique.⁷

It is somewhat ironic that Jean-Philippe Rameau should occupy such a central place on Balbastre's instrument not as a harpsichordist, but as a composer of operatic works. Laurence Libin speculates that Balbastre's harpsichord and its decoration commemorated Rameau's career and the triumphant production of *Castor et Pollux* at the Académie Royale three years after his death in 1764, which followed more than a decade of debates on the aesthetic merits of his operatic compositions. Indeed, Balbastre had encountered a politically fraught musical society when he arrived in Paris, in which Rameau and other musicians of his generation were under attack by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among others, for defending a style of French opera that was putatively less expressive and natural than the newer Italianate one. From 1752 to 1754, these tensions were known as the *Querelle des bouffons*. Although Balbastre himself never wrote an opera, he was a supporter and friend of Rameau and had acquired a reputation for virtuosic harpsichord and organ performances of opera arrangements. His investment in the operatic politics of the day might have been as much socially and economically driven as it was musical: the *Querelle* not only splintered the milieus in which he circulated, but also definitively transformed the status of the opera arrangement—a genre rooted in the Ancien Régime. Balbastre's career, like that of many other harpsichordists and organists of the time, was jeopardized by the rush of opera arrangements for keyboard published in the decades prior to the French Revolution, many of which were pirated and whose quality diminished in the wake of the popular success of Italianate *opéras-comiques*. As time went by, the public image Balbastre had constructed during the *Querelle* hardened into an explicit stance of resistance against both the music of the *bouffonistes* and the musical economy to which it had given rise. Within the context of Balbastre's life and career, the *ravalement* and decoration of his harpsichord might thus be understood not merely as a personal response to the *Querelle*, but as evidence of how the operatic politics of the late eighteenth century permeated the realm of the harpsichord in Paris.

Balbastre was born on 8 December 1724 in Dijon, Rameau's hometown. He studied the organ with Claude Rameau, Jean-Philippe's younger brother and the father of "Rameau's nephew," the subject of Diderot's eponymous satire.

⁷ Florence Gétreau, "The Portraits of Rameau: A Methodological Approach," *Music in Art* 36, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Autumn, 2011): 275–300; and Libin, "A Rediscovered Portrayal of Rameau and 'Castor et Pollux,'" 511.

Balbastre succeeded Rameau as organist at the Cathédrale Saint-Bénigne in Dijon when he was only eighteen years old. Although his contract engaged him for twelve years, he abruptly left Dijon seven years later without giving notice, on 10 October 1750.⁸ Six days later the young musician and composer arrived in Paris, where he attempted to launch his career by playing transcriptions of Rameau's operatic works and thereby forging a musical alliance with the older composer. Opera arrangements had long been a staple genre for young keyboardists, who performed them widely and circulated them in manuscript and engraved collections of harpsichord pieces to publicly ally themselves with teachers, mentors, or other established musicians. Balbastre's decision to focus on Rameau's music may therefore have seemed obvious: after all, the Parisian public probably already associated him with Rameau owing to their shared ties to Dijon and to Rameau's brother. Balbastre emphasized this perceived connection by conspicuously positioning himself as a *ramiste* during the *Querelle des bouffons*.

Two eighteenth-century sources bring to light salient details of Balbastre's and Rameau's relationship in the 1750s: Jean-Benjamin de Laborde's *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne* (1780) and Hugues Maret's *Éloge historique de M. Rameau* (1765).⁹ Laborde's account is a report of an event that had taken place thirty years earlier, when he was sixteen. According to Laborde, Balbastre arrived in Paris on 16 October 1750, and two years later he played a transcription of the Overture from Rameau's *Pigmalion* (1748) at court for the composer himself.¹⁰

In 1752, he [Balbastre] had the honor to be called to court to play the Overture to *Pygmalion* that he had arranged for the harpsichord.

Rameau had extended welcome to his talents as they well deserved it, and, as a compatriot and friend, encouraged him with his advice and lessons.¹¹

Laborde goes on to describe Balbastre's successes as an organist, beginning with his debut at the Concert Spirituel on 21 March 1755. Balbastre became so

⁸ Érik Kocevar, "Les origines familiales et la jeunesse de Claude Balbastre (1724–1799)," *Grand Jeu*, nos. 32–34 (February 2000): 9–11.

⁹ Jean-Benjamin de Laborde, *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, vol. 3 (Paris: Ph.-D. Pierres, 1780); and Hugues Maret, *Éloge historique de M. Rameau...* (Dijon: chez Causse, 1766).

¹⁰ *Pigmalion, acte de ballet, mis en musique par M. Rameau et exécuté pour la première fois par l'Académie Royale de Musique, le 27. Août 1748* (Paris: Boivin, Leclerc, ca. 1748).

¹¹ "En 1752, il [Balbastre] eut l'honneur d'être mandé à la cour pour y exécuter l'ouverture de *Pygmalion* qu'il avait arrangée pour le clavecin. Rameau qui avait accueilli ses talens comme ils le méritaient, l'encouragea par ses avis & ses leçons, comme compatriot & ami." Laborde, *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, 3:383.

popular with Parisian audiences, Laborde explains, that he was forbidden by the archbishop of Paris from playing the Midnight Mass and the Te Deum after drawing excessively large crowds in 1776.¹²

Hugues Maret's *Éloge historique*, presented at the Académie des Sciences, Arts et Belles-Lettres de Dijon in 1765 (fifteen years after Balbastre's arrival in Paris), cites a letter that Maret claims to have received from Balbastre himself regarding his relationship with Rameau.

The ouverture of this opera [*Pigmalion*] was set for the harpsichord by M. Balbâtre. It was in 1754 that the celebrated organist played it for the first time at M. de la [Pouplinière's salon] in the presence of M. Rameau, who believed it to be a nearly impossible thing. "He was so struck and so satisfied," Mr. Balbâtre wrote to me, "that he gave me unequivocal proof of it. I told him that I wanted to save the piece for myself and not share it with anyone; 'to the contrary,' replied M. Rameau, 'you must give it to all the organists and harpsichordists.'... Some time later, Mde. la Comtesse de la Marck wrote to me that the late Monseigneur le Dauphin wished to hear it; and I had the honor of playing it at Versailles before the Prince and the entire court."¹³

These events are unlikely to have taken place in 1754, since Rameau was no longer in the service of La Pouplinière at that time. That notwithstanding, this anecdote, like that of Laborde, depicts Balbastre and Rameau as vivid personalities. Rameau published *Pigmalion* in 1748, two years before Balbastre left Dijon, and Balbastre began playing the ouverture as early as 1752, two years after he moved to Paris and in the midst of the *Querelle*.

As risky as it was for Balbastre to throw himself into the *Querelle*, Rameau had to calculate how best to manage the newcomer's efforts in light of his own precarious position. Laborde and Maret's accounts of Balbastre's performance of the Overture to *Pigmalion* suggest that Rameau was willing to acknowledge that Balbastre's performance was impressive and did his composition justice. The rapid repeated notes and the *batteries* in the Overture to *Pigmalion* demand precise technique and a well-regulated instrument. It seems that Rameau was struck as much by Balbastre's virtuosity and technical mastery as he was by the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "L'ouverture de cet opéra a été mise sur le clavecin par M. Balbâtre. Ce fut en 1754 que ce célèbre Organiste la joua, pour la première fois, chez M. de la Pouplinière, en présence de M. Rameau, qui croyoit la chose presque impossible. 'Il en fut si étonné & si satisfait,' m'a écrit Mr. Balbâtre, 'qu'il m'en donna des preuves non équivoques. Je lui dis que je voulois conserver cette pièce pour moi, & n'en faire part à personne ; au contraire, reprit M. Rameau, il faut la donner à tous les Organistes et à tous les Clavecinistes.... Quelques temps après Mde. la Comtesse de la Marck m'écrivit que feu Monseigneur le Dauphin desiroit l'entendre ; & j'eus l'honneur de la jouer à Versailles devant ce Prince & toute la Cour.'" Maret, *Éloge historique de M. Rameau*..., 66.

Year	1755	1756	1757	1758	1759	1760	1761
# of documented opera airs performed	17	18	13	18	10	8	6
Year	1762	1763	1764	1765	1766	1767	
# of documented opera airs performed	12	7	6	7	10	12	
Year	1768	1769	1770	1771	1772	1781	
# of documented opera airs performed	5	4	3	1	2	1	

Table 1 Number of opera airs performed by Balbastre at the Concert Spirituel per year, 1755–1781. (Constant Pierre, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel*, 1725–1790, 268–319.)

transcription and his ability to evoke the sound of the Ramellian orchestra. Perhaps the composer thought it would be strategic to have Balbastre play keyboard arrangements of his operas more widely outside of their politically charged operatic contexts, which might even de-escalate the conflict that surrounded him: after all, the emerging styles in keyboard music were less divisive than were the competing national styles on the operatic stage.

Whether or not Balbastre was involved in circulating the anecdotes reported by Laborde and Maret, he successfully reinforced the musical link between Rameau’s music and his own virtuosity through his choice of repertoire in his performances, as Maret noted.

Since this date, M. Balbâtre played this overture several times at the Concert Spirituel, to the great satisfaction of audiences; he even set several other pieces from Rameau’s operas for the harpsichord, all of which were played at the Concert Spirituel with applause, and which are the ouvertures to *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*, *Les Talents lyriques*, *Platée*, and *Zoroastre*, as well as the pantomime from *Pigmalion* and other *airs de ballet*.¹⁴ [Table 1]

Of the pieces cited by Maret, only the “Pantomime” and a few *airs de ballet* from *Pigmalion* survive. In his study of the Concert Spirituel, Constant Pierre noted that Balbastre played the brilliant Overture from *Pigmalion* no fewer than twelve

¹⁴ “Depuis ce temps-là M. Balbâtre a exécuté plusieurs fois cette ouverture au concert spirituel, à la grande satisfaction du public; il a mis de même sur le clavecin plusieurs autre morceaux des opera de Rameau, qui tous ont été joués au concert spirituel avec applaudissement, & qui sont l’ouverture des Fêtes de Polymnie, celle des Talents lyriques, de Platée & de Zoroastre, ainsi que la pantomime de Pigmalion, outre plusieurs airs de ballets.” Ibid.

8 May 1755	Ouverture de Pygmalion (no. 547)
29 May 1755	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 549)
2 Feb. 1756	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 556)
9 Apr. 1756	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 560)
23 Apr. 1756	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 569)
8 Dec. 1756	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 577)
22 Mar. 1758	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 610)
10 May 1761	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 665)
22 Mar. 1763	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 689)
8 Sep. 1765	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 759)
24 Mar. 1766	Ouverture de Pygmalion, Air du 3e Acte des Talents lyriques, Les Sauvages (no. 766)
27 Mar.–1 Apr. 1766	Ouverture de Pygmalion et Les Sauvages (no. 774)
8 Sep. 1766	“Suite de symphonies” (no. 782)
8 Apr. 1768	“Suite de symphonies” (no. 825)
8 Dec. 1768	“Suite de symphonies” (no. 832)

Table 2 Dates of Balbastre’s performances of the *Ouverture* from *Pygmalion* at the *Concert Spirituel*, followed by Pierre’s catalogue number of the performance (Constant Pierre, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel, 1725–1790*, 268–319).

times between May 1755 and December 1768, and almost always paired it with “Les Sauvages” from *Les Indes galantes* (Table 2).¹⁵

The evidence adduced by Pierre suggests that, during Rameau’s lifetime, about half of Balbastre’s performances at the *Concert Spirituel* involved transcriptions of music by Rameau; the remaining ones were mostly devoted to works by Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville, Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer, and others. Moreover, Maret asserts that Balbastre performed many works by Rameau that were not listed in Pierre’s catalogue: the overtures to *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*, *Les Talents lyriques*, *Platée*, and *Zoroastre*. Balbastre’s performances of these pieces presumably took place on days for which no specific works are listed. The conclusion can only be that Balbastre played far more Rameau than appears in Pierre’s catalogue. In his compositions, he sometimes cited entire movements by Rameau, as in his *Livre contenant des pièces de différents genres d’orgue et de*

¹⁵ Constant Pierre, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel: 1725–1790* (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 2000, 1974), 268–319.



Example 1a “Ouvverture de Pigmalion par Mr Rameau mise en piece de Clavecin par Mr Balbâtre”, F-Pn Musique D. 11717, f. 62r, mm. 1–24.

clavecin (1749), where he interpolates “La Timide” from Rameau’s *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* (1741) into his first organ concerto.¹⁶

The sole physical trace of the version of the *Ouvverture* from *Pigmalion* played by Balbastre is an anonymous and unprovenanced score copied on a bifolio conserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, F-Pn Musique D.11717.¹⁷ Only the title, “Ouvverture de Pigmalion par Mr Rameau mise en pièce de Clavecin par

¹⁶ Claude Balbastre, *Livre contenant des pièces de différents genres d'orgue et de clavecin, par le Sr Balbastre, Organiste de la cathédrale de Dijon, 1749; Fac-similé du manuscrit musical 264 de la Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles*, ed. Denis Herlin (Paris: Minkoff France, 1999).

¹⁷ Claude Balbastre, *Quatre pièces extraites de Pygmalion adaptées au Clavecin par Claude Balbastre*, ed. Kenneth Gilbert (Paris: Editions Musicales, Alphonse Leduc, 1983); and “Ouvverture de *Pigmalion* par Mr Rameau mise en pièce de Clavecin par Mr Balbâtre,” F-Pn Musique D. 11717. The same person who copied D. 11717 also made a copy on another leaf of the same origin and format of Rameau’s virtuosic *pièce de clavecin*, “Les Cyclopes,” which survives as the neighboring call number at the Bibliothèque nationale, F-Pn Musique D. 11716. Both pieces appear to have been part of a larger collection of music that was once sewn together but no longer survives.



Example 1b *Ouverture from Pigmalion. Rameau, Pigmalion, acte de ballet, mis en musique par M. Rameau et exécuté pour la première fois par l'Académie Royale de Musique, le 27. Août 1748 (Paris: Boivin, Leclerc, ca. 1748), mm. 1–19.*

Mr Balbâtre,” links Balbastre to this fragment. Several details suggest that the score was copied by an amateur, not by an accomplished musician. The awkward fingerings added later in pencil suggest that it remained in the hands of another student or amateur musician.

The first part of the transcription is little more than a simplified adaptation of the *partition réduite* published by Rameau in 1748 (Example 1a, 1b), and mistakes abound where the arrangement diverges from Rameau’s score (Example 1c). Inner voices are often omitted or modified, sometimes to make trills easier to play. The addition of octaves in the bass and accompanimental chords enrich the arrangement’s otherwise sparse texture, but these modifications are realized inconsistently. A close examination of the text makes it hard to believe that it corresponds to the brilliant transcription that so impressed Rameau. There are too few modifications to the *partition réduite* to make the transcription characteristic of idiomatic harpsichord writing of the period, let alone of Balbastre’s or Rameau’s own *pièces de clavecin*.

By the 1750s, there was a long tradition of keyboard arrangements published in Paris. Beginning with those of d’Anglebert (1689), they had typically shown great refinement in their deployment of idiomatic keyboard figures. Royer’s *Pièces de clavecin* (1746), for example, contains five transcriptions from his operas *Zaïde* and *Le Pouvoir de l’amour*. In his adaptation of the “Marche pour le Sacrifice” (Act III.2), rapid scalar passages for the strings are transformed into keyboard arpeg-



Example 1c “Ouverture de Pigmalion par Mr Rameau mise en piece de Clavecin par Mr Balbâtre”, F-Pn Musique D. 11717, f. 64v, mm. 36–48.

gios (Example 2).¹⁸ By contrast, the vast majority of opera arrangements took the form of lightly adapted *partitions réduites*, reduced scores that reproduced vocal parts and the outer orchestral parts. Though a *partition réduite* might look like a keyboard score, the disposition and range of the parts often made them unplayable. One well-known example of a *partition réduite* adapted for the keyboard is Rameau’s *Les Indes galantes, balet réduit à quatre grands concerts* (1736), which features several characteristics of idiomatic harpsichord writing while presenting the musician with sections that are unplayable by a single person. This appears to have served as the model for later arrangements of airs from *opéras-comiques*. The first successful musical periodical in Paris, the *Journal de Clavecin*, presented keyboard arrangements of *opéras-comiques* with vocal parts that were based on *partitions réduites* and to which keyboard ornamentation and occasionally bass figures were added. They likely served as a loose guide for amateur chamber music: with all the vocal parts, a loose instrumental scoring, and basso continuo figures, they could be played either solo or *en concert*.

Concomitantly, the commercial value of keyboard music varied widely in Paris in the second half of the eighteenth century. Royer’s *Pièces de clavecin* provided

¹⁸ Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer, *Pièces de clavecin, premier livre* (Paris: chez l’auteur, Mme. Boivin, Le Sr Le Clerc, 1746).



Example 2a “Marche pour le Sacrifice” from Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer, *Le Pouvoir de l’amour*, ballet héroïque, Act III, Scene 2, mm. 10–17.

25 pages of music for 9 livres (0.36 livres per page), and Balbastre’s first book of *Pièces de clavecin* (1759) were sold for 12 livres for 27 pages of music (0.44 livres per page).¹⁹ At the other end of the market, the 224 pages of transcriptions contained in Rameau’s 1736 *Indes galantes* edition cost buyers a mere 12 livres (0.054 livres per page), and the *Journal de clavecin* (1762–1772) came at a price of 2 livres per month or 12 livres per year by subscription.²⁰

The transcription of the Ouverture from *Pigmalion* at the Bibliothèque natio-

¹⁹ Claude Balbastre, *Pièces de clavecin, premier livre* (Paris: chez l’auteur, chez M. de Caze, 1759).

²⁰ Bruce Gustafson and David R. Fuller, eds., *A Catalogue of French Harpsichord Music: 1699–1780* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 17–19.



Example 2b *Allemande* from Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer, *Pièces de clavecin*, premier livre (Paris, chez l'auteur, Mme. Boivin, Le Sr Le Clerc, 1746), mm. 10–17.

nale de France looks much more like the latter group of lightly modified—and inexpensive—*partitions réduites*. And yet if Balbastre's transcriptions were so celebrated that they remained favorites of his audiences for more than fifteen years, it seems likely that they would have borne more similarities to Royer's nuanced keyboard arrangements, for example, than to the basic arrangements of reduced scores that were already available to Parisian amateurs. Balbastre's skills as an arranger and improviser must have been difficult to imitate, copy, and sell without his involvement in order for them to have maintained their reputation for so long. Balbastre seems not to have followed Rameau's injunction to make his arrangements available to other players, perhaps because, as he put it, he preferred to "save the piece for himself."²¹ This personal position might explain the lack of other manuscripts and the absence of any publications including such a popular arrangement at a time when opera transcriptions were in vogue. Could this particular fragment have been a listener's attempt to record an echo of what Balbastre played in concert but refused to publish?

Perhaps Balbastre's strategy included dazzling his listeners with the virtuosic Overture to *Pigmalion* only to follow it up with a popular crowd-pleaser that everyone, no matter how musically illiterate, would be able to identify and

²¹ Maret, *Éloge historique de M. Rameau...*, 66.

remember vividly: “Les Sauvages.” Few pieces could have contrasted so strongly with a transcription he had crafted and wished to reserve for himself than “Les Sauvages,” which had been published and arranged by Rameau in several different versions and had been on the Parisian music market since 1728. At the same time that Balbastre withheld his transcriptions of the Overtures from *Pigmalion*, *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*, *Les Talents lyriques*, *Platée*, and *Zoroastre*, presumably to keep them out of the hands of a general public, he openly advertised his ties to Rameau by performing arrangements and publishing a select few in manuscript form.²² Balbastre’s comfort with incorporating excerpts of Rameau’s music into his own compositions indicates that sharing ownership of these pieces with Rameau was essential to the public impression of his relationship with the older composer.

Whether by design or felicitous accident, Balbastre successfully integrated himself into a prestigious lineage of instrumentalists known for their opera arrangements—a list which includes d’Anglebert, Rameau, and Royer—and established himself as one of the best organists and harpsichordists in France. If Balbastre did not meet the composers of the Académie Royale upon arriving in Paris, he certainly would have met them once he began participating in the Concert Spirituel in 1755, where he played arrangements of music by Royer (a former director of the Concert Spirituel) and Mondonville (the current incumbent).²³ In 1756, he became organist at the Église Saint-Roch in Paris. Balbastre’s renown rose to such an extent that after the publication of his *Pièces de clavecin* (1759), he secured a post as one of the four organists at Notre-Dame de Paris in 1760.

Although he was no longer dependent on his opera transcriptions, he continued to play them at the Concert Spirituel and crafted new ones into the late 1760s. Some of these survive in a rich, finely decorated manuscript, the *Recueil d’airs choisis de plusieurs opéras* (F-Pn Musique Vm7 2108). The *Recueil*, prepared by a professional copyist and bound in gold-tooled green morocco, contains more than fifty harpsichord pieces, of which half are opera transcriptions. In his study of the manuscript, David Fuller argues that the music was copied “from originals supplied by Balbastre,” concluding that the volume constitutes “a collection emanating in some way from Balbastre.”²⁴ Fuller identifies the collection as one

²² Ibid.

²³ Pierre, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel: 1725–1790*, 117. Pierre explains that, while Royer’s widow and Gabriel Capperan were the official directors and owners of the Concert Spirituel, Mondonville served as artistic director and took charge of much of its management.

²⁴ Neal Zaslaw, “At the Paris Opéra in 1747,” *Early Music* 11, no. 4 (Oct. 1983): 514–16; and David Fuller, “Les petits marteaux de M. Rameau,” *Early Music* 11, no. 4 (Oct. 1983): 516–17.



Example 3 *Pantomime from Pigmalion, Recueil d'airs choisis de plusieurs Operas accommodés pour Le Clavecin par Mr. Balbastre, Organiste de la Paroisse St. Roch de Paris, F-Pn Musique Vm7 2108.*

of only two sources for Rameau's harpsichord piece "Les petits marteaux." That the three latest works in the manuscript date from 1761—Antoine Dauvergne's *tragédie-lyrique Hercule mourant*; Monsigny's *opéra-bouffon On ne s'avise jamais de tout*; and André-Danican Philidor's *Le maréchal ferrant*—suggests that it was probably assembled in that year or soon thereafter. As in the case of the *Ouverture from Pigmalion* at the Bibliothèque nationale, the style of writing and the kinds of pieces found in the *Recueil* seem simpler than what we might imagine Balbastre played in concert (Example 3). Although the manuscript contains the "Pantomime," "Giga," "Gavotte gracieuse," and "Contredanse" from *Pigmalion*, it lacks most of the transcriptions that Maret claimed made Balbastre famous. If Balbastre was indeed responsible for the organization and preparation of the manuscript, did he omit his arrangements of the *Ouvertures from Pigmalion, Les Fêtes de Polymnie, Talents lyriques, Platée, and Zoroastre* from the scores he provided his copyist for the reason he cited to Maret?

The grouping of works in the *Recueil* gives us an indication of how Balbastre approached the debates of the *Querelle des bouffons*. The manuscript juxtaposes the "French" music of composers such as Balbastre, Rameau, and Mondonville with works by the Italianate *bouffonistes* of the *Querelle* such as Monsigny, Philidor, and Rousseau. In light of Balbastre's deep loyalty to Rameau and the *ramistes*, it seems contradictory that he would also arrange pieces by the *bouffonistes* in this monumental collection of opera transcriptions. Perhaps the recipient of the collection, who remains unknown, had a particular predilection for *opéras-comiques*. It is also possible that Balbastre's firsthand experiences of

the *Querelle* as a source of social division as well as aesthetic debate played a role in his decision to include this repertoire.

When Balbastre moved to Paris, tensions were mounting between Rameau and his patron, the *fermier general* Alexandre Le Riche de La Pouplinière (1693–1762). In 1753—one year before Maret claims that Balbastre played his transcription of the Overture from *Pigmalion* for Rameau at La Pouplinière's salon, and one year after Laborde dates Balbastre's concert at court, which Rameau reportedly attended—these tensions finally hit a breaking point, culminating in Rameau's dismissal from La Pouplinière's household. La Pouplinière's mistress, Madame de Saint-Aubin, had influenced his musical tastes and slowly turned him away from Rameau. She was a *bouffoniste* and had introduced into her lover's salon a new musical world that included such powerful personalities as Rousseau.²⁵

Her power was not limited to debates on opera. Born Jeanne-Thérèse Goermans, Madame de Saint-Aubin was the daughter of the harpsichord builder, Jean Goermans I (1703–1777). The Goermans family was a rival of the Blanchet-Taskin dynasty of harpsichord builders, whose last two members, François-Étienne Blanchet II (ca. 1700–1761) and his successor, Pascal Taskin, maintained close ties to the crown.²⁶ Balbastre possessed instruments by both Blanchet and Taskin: first, a “clavecin à marteau a ravallement à un seul clavier et tire dans son etuy de bois peint, le clavecin fait par Blanchet,” according to the inventory made after the death of Balbastre's wife, Marie-Geneviève Hotteterre; and second, the Flemish instrument described by Burney, which had likely undergone a *ravalement* at Taskin's hands.²⁷

Balbastre would have had reason to be at odds with Madame de Saint-Aubin because of his loyalty to Rameau and the Blanchet-Taskin family. He was also dependent on the same royal institutions that came under attack by the *bouf-*

²⁵ Cuthbert Girdlestone, *Jean-Philippe Rameau: His Life and Work* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2014), 480.

²⁶ Ernest Closson, “Pascal Taskin,” *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* 12. Jahrg., H. 2 (Jan.–Mar., 1911): 237.

²⁷ Marie-Geneviève Hotteterre's *inventaire après décès*, Archives Nationales (Paris), Minutier Central XLVI 392 14 November 1763, cited in William Dowd, “The Surviving Instruments of the Blanchet Workshop,” in *The Historical Harpsichord: A Monograph Series in Honor of Frank Hubbard*, ed. Howard Schott (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1984), 89n18. Marie-Geneviève Hotteterre was the daughter of the flute-maker Jacques-Martin Hotteterre (1673–1763) and one of the last descendants of the Hotteterre family. She married Balbastre in January 1763—with Rameau as a witness—and died in October of the same year. See Tula Giannini, “Jacques Hotteterre le Romain and His Father, Martin: A Re-Examination Based on Recently Found Documents,” in “French Baroque II,” special issue, *Early Music* 21 no. 3, (Aug., 1993): 377–86, 389–90, and 393–95.

fonistes who were now welcome in La Pouplinière's salon. Nevertheless, even as he reinforced his ties to musical communities and institutions that harbored *ramistes*, he did not turn away from the simpler Italianate music found in compositions by the *bouffonistes*. If, from Balbastre's point of view, the debate over operatic styles was less important than how the communities of *ramistes* and *bouffonistes* interacted with one another, it would make sense that he appears to have rejected the economic and social practices the *bouffonistes* cultivated rather than the music they produced.

The onstage success of the works composed by the *bouffonistes* was followed by the commercial popularity of their printed scores. The Académie and Opéra Comique, which had begun selling full scores, were undercut by keyboard arrangements that were cheaper and more adaptable to domestic and other private forms of music-making. These new publications were prepared independently by publishing houses rather than by individual composers and musicians, and they were typically of poor quality by comparison to full opera scores and *partitions réduites*. They were often tailored to suit a broader range of instruments than the arrangements prepared by musicians like Balbastre and Royer. The editor of the *Journal de Clavecin*, which published suites comprised of airs from *opéras-comiques* for the harpsichord, specifically indicated that the pieces could be played not only on the harpsichord or fortepiano, but also with the vocal parts and with the accompaniment of a violin, harp, or guitar.

Preparing and selling opera airs in these formats became so lucrative that the transcription of operatic works sustained the careers of musicians such as Josse-François-Joseph Benaut, Pierre-Antoine César, and Jean-Frédéric Edelmann. Music publishers took further advantage of the new commercial market by synchronizing the sale of opera arrangements with the premieres of the operas and turning audiences away from the scores sold by the Académie and Opéra Comique.²⁸ Over the next few decades, the frequency of these publications increased to such an extent that many began to question the ethics of these publications. A commentator in the *Mercure de France* of 1785 deplored the poor treatment of opera composers and proposed the following solution:

We have often had occasion to speak out against these arrangements of music made without the participation of the Author, veritable highway robbery, in which the Artists, and often even the public, are equally duped. M. Grétry also just complained about this publicly. It would be desirable that, as a result of complaints, a new order be established that would assure authors' rights. We believe that the surest way

²⁸ Anik Devriès-Lesure, *L'édition musicale dans la presse parisienne au xviii^e siècle* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2005), xix.

is for authors to be charged with the future of these arrangements, which will be viewed as far preferable in the eyes of the public.²⁹

In stark contrast to the composers of Italianate music who dominated the music market, Balbastre seems to have refused to print and publish the works that made him famous—a stance which perhaps saved his career in the aftermath of the *Querelle des bouffons*. By reserving his most virtuosic transcriptions for himself, as he described it to Rameau, Balbastre prolonged the novelty of the pieces and their artistic merits. By the late 1750s, after the *Querelle*, the constant references to Rameau in music that circulated in Balbastre's manuscripts, performances in royal institutions, the elite connotations of his musical practices, and even the decoration of his harpsichord set him apart from this new wave of music editors and arrangers. Could Balbastre's apparently self-imposed exile from the market for printed music have been a statement against the new politics of keyboard music, especially as it related to opera transcriptions?

The growing popularity and commercialism of the transcription trade eventually contributed to the dissolution of the close relationships between composers and arrangers, a model of apprenticeship exemplified by the case of Balbastre and Rameau. In print, manuscript, and performance, the opera transcription ceased to symbolize homage, friendship, or mentorship, as it had clearly done in the case of Balbastre. Instead, it became a site of tension between composers and the publishing houses supported by the Parisian public's thirst for *nouveautés*. Music editors became the subject of numerous critiques by their own clientele, who questioned their motivations and profits. The opera transcription would maintain its disreputable connotations until Liszt's time.

For his part, Balbastre seems to have made a conscious decision not to publish his arrangements of operas by Rameau and the *ramistes*. His manuscripts enjoyed limited circulation among an exclusive upper-class society while music publishers gave an increasingly large Parisian public access to opera transcriptions. By the late 1760s, Balbastre had stopped playing the Overture from *Pigmalion* and "Les Sauvages" at the Concert Spirituel. Instead of drawing on his old repertoire, Balbastre sought out professional posts as an organist in churches

²⁹ "Nous avons souvent l'occasion de parler contre tous ces arrangemens de musique faits sans la participation de l'Auteur, véritable brigandage, dont les Artistes, & souvent même le public, sont également dupes. M. Grétry vient aussi de s'en plaindre publiquement. Il est à désirer qu'à force de réclamations, il s'établisse un nouvel ordre qui mette en sûreté la propriété des auteurs. Nous croyons que le plus sûr moyen est que les auteurs se chargent eux-mêmes à l'avenir de ces arrangemens, qui mériteront alors aux yeux du public une entière préférence." *Mercure de France*, 9 April 1785, 95–96, cited in Devriès-Lesure, *L'édition musicale*, xix.

and chapels in Paris and began composing concerti for the “pianoforté organisé”, which he performed at the Concert Spirituel. Ultimately, Balbastre’s reliance on musical institutions related to the court and Church—and the social rituals that accompanied them—led to his professional downfall during the Revolution, despite attempts at adaptation, such as his performance of an arrangement of “La Marseillaise” at one of his last concerts on the organ at the deconsecrated Notre Dame in 1793.

When we take Balbastre’s œuvre and career into account, the Ruckers-Taskin harpsichord Burney described in *The Present State of Music* acquires new significance. Combined with the image of Rameau watching *Castor et Pollux* from beyond the grave, the manuscript of Balbastre’s “Pastorale” painted on the name batten locates Balbastre in a cultural space that united opera and the harpsichord. The instrument and its decoration can be seen as a reflection of a keyboard player’s engagement with the *Querelle des bouffons*. Although his practice of transcribing and mixing French operatic works with their Italianate counterparts seems to contradict his loyalty to the composers of French music, the impact of the *Querelle* on Balbastre was likely more social than musical. Like many performer-arrangers before him, Balbastre developed a career that rested on the value of his collaborations and the notion that the authorship of airs was shared among composers of operatic works and performers. The decoration and *ravalement* that Balbastre commissioned transformed his harpsichord into a monument to this musical society and the brief but fruitful marriage of operatic and keyboard culture that he encountered upon his arrival in Paris.

In the aftermath of the *Querelle des bouffons*, Balbastre saw this ethos and these musical practices dissolve. Owing to the new market for engraved music nourished by the *bouffonistes*, the opera transcription slipped from a social circle characterized by bonds of friendship and apprenticeship among composers and performer-arrangers into the hands of a less discriminating Parisian public—with all the challenges to ownership and copyright that this flourishing commerce posed. As keyboard arrangements became increasingly accessible, Balbastre’s musical skills as a performer fell out of demand a state of affairs exacerbated by his refusal or inability to satisfy evolving tastes and his association with musical elites whose days were numbered.

Despite the disappearance of the musical society to which Balbastre and Rameau belonged in the 1750s and early 1760s, the popularity of Rameau’s operatic works arranged for keyboard instruments survived Rameau’s life and Balbastre’s career. Throughout the eighteenth century, we find transcriptions of Rameau’s operas in personal commonplace manuscripts and in musical periodi-

cals. Taskin's *ravalement*, the lacquer decoration, and Rameau's portrait made reference to a bygone operatic milieu and its relationship to the harpsichord, but the instrument's survival testifies to the longevity of the music it commemorated. Balbastre paralleled the symbolism of his harpsichord in his performances: by playing music of the *ramistes* and particularly his own arrangements of Rameau's operas, he reminded his listeners of the value of this repertoire, prolonging public interest in Rameau's music, maintaining his image and his work in the face of criticism, and perpetuating the tradition of playing Rameau's operatic works at the keyboard.