

CHURCH MUSIC IN FRANCE : CAREERS, DIFFUSION AND CREATION (17TH-18TH CENTURIES)

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Until fifty years ago, there was little scholarly interest in French church music of the period from the Council of Trent to the Revolution. This can be explained by the fact that research on this subject led naturally on the most conspicuous and often most spectacular works, those emanating from the court of France or from composers close to its power.

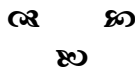
Moreover, it is likely that most of these compositions has been lost, first by the composers themselves, who are not always concerned about preserving their own works or who did not have the opportunity to publish, but also by their employers: the chapters, convents or church fabrics, which did little to preserve the repertory. Physical destruction and dispersion of church personnel during the French Revolution obviously increased the losses.

Several years ago, a group of musicologists and historians have come together to work on French church music, through the study of institutional and especially liturgical frameworks. This association has taken a more official way from 2009, with the submission of a research project dedicated to studying the *creation* of church music, funded by the French National Research Agency.

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This project, MUSÉFREM, put together 5 teams of historians and musicologists located in various regions of France. It attempts to compensate the loss of sacred repertoires by addressing the phenomenon of its creation from complementary angles : studying individual careers and institutions, the reception of this music, and creating a census and detailed study of musical sources and their place within the liturgy.

This is the first time this kind of systematic study has been undertaken, covering such a wide territory and such a long period of two centuries. Let's therefore present here the methods we are using, the tools employed and the first results we have obtained.



Surviving works from the period demonstrate the outstanding creativity that existed in the field of church music:

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The most visible is probably the creation and dissemination of the "motet à grand chœur" (until recently called "grand motet"). This, is characterized by a 5-parts choir, an ensemble of soloists and an orchestra playing symphonies, ritornellos or accompanying the choruses, ensembles and solo pieces called "récit".

This new important genre, closely related to Louis the 14th's assertion of his authority, first appears as part of special ceremonies celebrating the dynastic events; they are the works of 'modern' composers, such as Gobert, Veillot, Lully, Boesset, Expilly, Robert and Du Mont, capable of handling large musical forces and dramatic frescos. After the renewal of the sous-maîtres of the Chapel in 1683, the genre became the main decoration in the king's daily Mass. It is mainly represented by the works of Lalande, who established a model adopted by all the choral establishments of the major churches of the kingdom and at the Concert spirituel.

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Besides the "motet à grand chœur", another body of **motets** emerged in the mid seventeenth century, that were significantly smaller. Either printed or engraved, in scores format or as separate parts for voices and sometimes instruments, they were scored for various combinations. All of them however, include the new basso continuo, a sign of the modernization of the genre. Henry Du Mont initiated a decisive movement by editing, with support from the publisher Ballard, a first book of motets, the *Cantica sacra* in 1652.

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Between 1647 and 1789, we can count the appearance of 62 major published books, representing 41 composers. Most of them are major figures, who held positions in Paris, Versailles or in court circles (like Du Mont, Moulinié, Lallouette, Charpentier, Nivers, Clérambault, Morin, Couperin, Lalande, Campra, Bernier, Colin de Blamont, Madin, Mouret, Mondonville ...), others were provincial chapels masters (Brossard, Valette de Montigny, Villeneuve, Roussier), organists (Rauch, Corette) or simple musicians or parisian music masters (as Blondel, Noël — Lebègue's student —, Lochon, Boismortier, Lemaire, Le Menu de St. Philbert, Blainville), while a number of them worked for the Jesuits (Geoffroy, Foliot, Charpentier, Corette).

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Whatever their more or less modest positions, many of the composers sought to meet needs and expectations of non-professional musicians: namely performers of "private concerts", as well as the nuns and their pensioners, who were the intended audience of fully half of these published works. Some motets books are written specifically to them, or even for a particular community (for ex: Nivers and Clérambault for Saint-Cyr and Morin for Chelles), or nuns appear through a special dedication in the book. Composers also took into consideration the vocal abilities of their publics, as well as questions of duration and alternatim practices directly related to liturgical chant's practice. Few of these volumes are therefore directly addressed to

the choirs of major parish churches, cathedrals or collegiates, even if some of these motets may have been sometimes performed there.

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Next to these crucial innovations in motets that bring composers to explore new expressive possibilities, the surviving repertoire of the polyphonic mass and its traditional large-format still used in the collection of mass choir books edited by Ballard, appears at first sight much more conservative. The abandonment of the genre at the Royal Chapel at the beginning of Louis the 14th's reign explains its use was confined to major churches, which were more respectful of liturgical practices. We should not however, underestimate the importance of the genre on these grounds.

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Indeed, surprisingly, the number of surviving masses is far from negligible with 77 editions and a significant number of manuscripts. Besides, the mass remained the most important polyphonic genre integrated into the office and was represented by composers occupying the most prestigious positions, such as those of the "Sainte-Chapelle" and the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, as well as main cathedrals or collegiates in the kingdom.

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Finally, the ability of composers to adapt their styles and introduce a certain expressiveness is evident, especially with composers like André Campra or Jean Gilles. The collection published by Ballard should thus be considered a response to specific needs:

- on one hand as models for chapel masters to show to their students;
- on the other hand, as an auxiliary corpus adaptable to the vocal and instrumental forces available on feast days.

Therefore, we can understand better why the norms of publication required composers to reduce their scores to the basics essentials.

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As a key element in the liturgy, the **organ** is the first contributor to the solemnity of the major feasts of the year, and printed organ books emerge gradually during this period.

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Forty-nine printed organ books, from Titelouze in 1623 to Corette in 1787, were the work of twenty-six composers.

Those, who are mainly organists, tried to offer players, both male and female, a repertoire that could cover the all main feasts of the year, allowing them to adapt the role of the organ as it has been promoted after the Council of Trent.

In this context, organist composers also attempted to exploit the new expressive possibilities permitted by the evolution of the instrument during this period. It is indeed a repertoire intended for more or less virtuoso players, especially from the provinces, who were not necessarily aware of the evolution of the instrument. Thus these books are frequently provided with preliminary texts, describing the combinations of stops in the relation to different genre of pieces, explaining ornaments and how to properly perform on the organ, etc.

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In addition to these decisive changes in organ and vocal music, there was also in France the enhancement and a rational revision of plainchant, inspired by the revision of post-Tridentine Roman liturgical books, but more systematic. Stressed syllables are respected in the distribution of vocalized notes, while the principles of notation were reviewed to create a better match between the symbols and its intended execution.

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Throughout the seventeenth century, this leads to the development of a science of the plainchant, covering both theory and practice, a science that begins to examine old manuscripts from a critical angle.

From the late seventeenth century, this new science also allowed the development of principles of composition and revision of plainchant in the context of neo-Gallican liturgical reforms: the movement begins with the liturgical books of Paris (with the reformer Chastelain), and Cluny (reformed by Nivers). But it takes more scholarly direction with Poisson and Lebeuf who revised the chants of the churches of Sens, Auxerre and Paris in a second wave of revision, more erudite and formalized.

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But in the area of plainchant, the most surprising innovation for France is the creation of new ecclesiastical chants, composed especially for nuns, and intended to replace completely or partially the Gregorian chant into the offices. These chants have a new style using musical elements such as ornaments and more frequent short notes, which distinguish these new chants from the roughness of "medieval" Gregorian chant', by the introduction of a musical ethos by which the appellation "plain-chant musical" is therefore appropriate.

Despite such creativity, music sources attesting to this rich and varied practices remain rare, when we consider the many places which employed musicians, including one-hundred-

thirty cathedrals and collegiates, plus a large number of parishes and convents all over the kingdom.

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Given this situation, we can try to reconstitute the practice of church music from a diversity of different clues; these are:

- the preliminary texts of printed music sources;
- the remnants of musical sources directly used in practice, generally handwritten, and which can be found in fragmentary ecclesiastical Churches archives such as Puy-en- Velay, recently discovered, or originating from certain convents;
- The even rarer portfolios of composers (like that of Charpentier, which represents an extreme exception);
- but also the archives of the capitular churches;
- normative texts like ceremonials or liturgical writings can also be used to understand the liturgical constraints for church composers;
- and finally, the accounts, judgements or debates related to the reception of this music.

These are the sources we are trying to exploit within the Muséfrem's project.

Our work takes the form of publications of texts but also develops preexisting databases as follows:

The first tool is a prosopographical database. Multiplying biographies enables us to understand in depth this professional group, its nuances and internal logic. Only one moment in history has left a homogeneous documentation potentially concerning all church musicians: the turning-point between the Old Regime and the beginning of the French Revolution, symbolized by the year 1790.

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At this time, a very large number of musicians employed by capitular churches or by convents lost their jobs. In order to obtain relief they then drafted petitions, sometimes assembling a full dossier, in which they presented their situation and pleaded their case. This makes up a corpus of very rich sources, kept in Paris and all over France.

This large inquiry is presently conducted by a research team of historian in Clermont-Ferrand.

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Technically, for data acquisition, they have chosen the software developed for the Philidor database of the CMBV Baroque Music Center of Versailles. It is estimated that this base will in

time include some three thousand musicians –both men and women– at work in 1790. The data will also make it possible to have a look backward at the musical life of most of the 18th century.

Among the outstanding features this database allows us to observe, the phenomenon of itinerance as one of the most interesting to reevaluate. We can already draw a general typology for performing musicians, including singers.

Their mobility is highly variable: there are those who remain faithful to one position throughout their entire careers, like the composer Hardouin in Reims, and other musicians, who are more or less frequently movers within the same region, like here:

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You can see the moves of Jean-Baptiste Gallairdo in the south-west' region (with cities like Bordeaux, Bayonne, Auch...) or those of Pierre Jamart in the Bourbonnais' region.

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But there are also bigger travelers, like Nicolas Savart here, who moved in the all North part of France and ended his career at Tournai in Flanders. We can compare him with the composer Henri Madin who ended his career at the Royal Chapel, after Meaux, Verdun, Tours and Rouen's cathedrals.

The motivations for these moves are more difficult to grasp. The first studies show that travelling is often chosen: financial reasons obviously appear, but sometimes it is employers who come to solicit a good musician or a famous master. Another reason is training: it is recognized at the time that travel was beneficial for professional development. But on the contrary, mobility can be forced, when young musicians ending their early training as choir boys are pushed to find work elsewhere because their initial institution can not provide them a job. Frequent conflicts within musicians and chapters can also lead to forced departures.

Mobility also gives us a better idea of its role in the dissemination of musics, genres, writing or style evolutions that can be observed in music sources.

To conduct this kind of study, we are integrating data on music sources into specific databases. One of them is the revised catalog of the "motet à grand chœur" as well incorporated in the Versailles Baroque Center Philidor database, directed by Jean Duron and Françoise Talvard. Indeed, a revision of the first status of the datas published in 1984 (in the Thematic catalog of the sources of the French grand motet (1663-1792) directed by Jean Mongrédien) was necessary because of numerous studies, attributions and discoveries have been made since then.

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A systematic description of each 'motet à grand choeur' includes the clear separation of different versions of the same piece, a comparison of the different sources of the same motet, including literary sources... Everything is fully indexed: composers, authors of the text, performers, editors and copyists, places of performance, literary and musical incipits, dates of creation, publishing or execution, performance forces, etc. It indexes also each movement. This detailed description is fundamental to establishing source matches, because of the number of movements of these motets that have been edited, arranged and performed in the 18th century, more often for smaller numbers of performers.

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This catalog is completed by the printed motets' catalog edited by Nathalie Berton-Blivet, which is supplemented by the musical database called *Neuma*. There, direct searches on musical incipits allow identifications, useful when one is analysing a manuscript source or studying diffusion and adaptation of some works.

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This handwritten source is a book of motets for one or two voices and basso continuo dressed for nuns and copied after 1733 since as it contains arrangements of motets by Lemaire, published in that year.

This compilation contains fifty-nine motets, of which the only attributed motets are by Gilles (8) and Lalande (16).

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The comparison of the anonymous pieces with these of the Catalog of the motet printed in France, through *Neuma*, also reveals that it contains copies of motets by Foliot (3), Morin (3), Valette de Montigny (2) and Lemaire (14). Only twelve pieces remain anonymous.

All motets in this manuscript have been arranged: those by Lalande and Gilles are arrangements of "motets à grand choeur", while those by other composers are arrangements from printed sources. The main principles governing these arrangements can be deduced from a comparison of the manuscript with other printed or manuscript sources. The arrangements are all for one or two voices and basso continuo.

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In the case of arrangements of printed motets:

- Adaptations are made for female voices and organ accompaniment, plus sometimes range's adaptation like here;

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- Many cuts are made;
- Symphonies and ritornellos are removed, but in rare cases the melody, possibly abbreviated, is taken over by the right hand of the keyboard.

In the case of arrangements of 'motets à grand chœur' for smaller forces, we can see that:

- The chorus and instrumental sections are removed;
- Movements are never given in their entirety;
- Transpositions are frequent.

The arrangements present the original musical discourse in a condensed form that is in a sense suitable for female voices, and for the abilities and needs of nuns, thus following practices for which they are intended.

The homogeneity of all these adaptations suggests that they are the work of a single person that could have been an organist charged to accompany the one or two singers; these last ones could have been the sisters themselves or singers devoted to serve their community.

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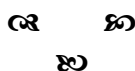
Such practices are confirmed by the prefaces and warnings that some composers put at the beginning of their publications.

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The database *Neuma* also indexes the corpus of plainchant musical masses, which is the subject of a special study I am in charge of within the Muséfrem project. Among the most interesting expressions of new ecclesiastical chants, this new kind of mass is one of the most iconic area of musical creation during the ancien regime of France. It has been almost completely ignored so far, or approached as a curiosity.

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In addition to the source intersections to identify the masses, to date them precisely, and to observe their circulation between convents and small parishes, *Neuma* allows a thorough study of the music through the complete entry of each piece.



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To conclude, we can draw a preliminary status of several results obtained in the work conducted within MUSÉFREM.

Firstly, we can observe that most composers were strongly invested in the movement of the Catholic Reformation, which, even if its establishment in France was delayed, it was nevertheless pursued with great rigor. The priorities of pastoral training and edification of the faithful are priorities relate directly to the musical means used by the Church.

Composers took an entirely new pragmatic approach, as with the adoption and development of the motet with basso continuo accompaniment and occasional instruments, whose malleability and adaptability were thoroughly explored by its composers; the motet was thus often seen as having to adapt to actual conditions, the special uses and liturgical constraints. Composers' involvement was also strong in the area of plainchant. Both in terms of its revision, adaptation and reconstruction within the neo-Gallican liturgical reforms, as well as in the composition of new ecclesiastical chants, where we can see that composers were decisive and respected actors alongside the clerics who would gradually replace them in this speciality: we think especially here of Ouvrard, Nivers, and Brossard, editor of the chant of the diocese of Meaux, but also the Notre-Dame master Mignon, who was involved with plainchant for the Paris diocese, or Du Mont, Bournonville and Robert, who were often consulted to approve printed chant books.

Moreover, we can see through these publications that music was considered as an essential, active element of the offices and significant in its expressive dimension: something that has sometimes been called into question; it is one of the points studied within the Muséfrem project by Thierry Favier's team at Poitiers.

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Another significant finding is the presence of women in this creative context, which can no longer be ignored. They have so far appeared in the prosopographical survey as organists, however discreetly, most often because they were not entitled to any legal status, in most cases replacing their fathers, husbands or brothers. Currently, hundred and ten musicians women are represented in the census of 1790, most of them active in religious communities. A few of them played in the cathedrals (2), collegiate (10) and parishes (6). But if the majority of these women were organists, they may have also been mistresses of chant and music in convents, as well as singers.

Women religious also appear as the first beneficiaries of motets, new ecclesiastical chants and church masses in "plainchant musical". Composers took into consideration their more or less amateur musical level, their alternatim practices related to conventual offices, and offered them music characterised by an ethos of gentleness, simplicity and expressivity, that could express their piety while facilitating the edification of faithful who attended their offices.

Finally, the study of musicians who traveled from one church to another sheds a new light on the phenomenon of the dissemination of works, genres and their evolution. This mobility offers a better understanding of the state of church music at the end of the era: that is to say a

certain stylistic uniformity that contrasts to the diversity of the previous century, particularly through the adoption of the “motet à grand choeur” over the entire kingdom, which can be observed even through the acculturation of the Versailles style within mass in plain-chant musical.

We finish now with an example of it :

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Thank you for your attention.

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