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## A dialogue between a maker and a musicologist regarding the instruments of Vincent Tibaut of Toulouse

Marie Demeilliez

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# SOUNDING BOARD

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## A dialogue between a harpsichord maker and a musicologist, regarding

# *The instruments of Vincent Tibaut of Toulouse*

*Some ten years ago, Emile Jobin and Marie Demeilliez published a study, in French,<sup>1</sup> about Jobin's experiments in making 'Tibaut' harpsichords and how his findings reflect the musical practices and the repertoire of the late 17th century. (A.Z.)*

Since the 1990s, the harpsichord maker Émile Jobin has built several instruments inspired by those of Vincent Tibaut of Toulouse, of which three harpsichords from the end of the 17th century are preserved<sup>2</sup>. First in 1993, Jobin made a facsimile of the harpsichord kept in the Musée de la Musique in Paris, hardly modified since the 18th century<sup>3</sup>. Subsequently, he built several copies of the Tibaut harpsichords with which he experimented, in an attempt to return to the original state of the museum's harpsichord (which had suffered several modifications at the beginning of the eighteenth century) and to realise the improvements that Tibaut may have envisaged. Jobin's Tibaut harpsichords are well known to harpsichord lovers and players: one of them belongs to the Paris Conservatoire (CNSMDP), where many young professional harpsichordists have been trained. These harpsichords, inspired by Tibaut, are also regularly used on recordings and in concerts.



*The Tibaut dated 1679  
(Musée des Instruments  
de Musique de Bruxelles)*

[https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/doc/IFD/OAI\\_RMAH\\_106173\\_NL](https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/doc/IFD/OAI_RMAH_106173_NL)

<sup>1</sup> "Clavecins anciens et fac-similés – l'exemple des instruments de Tibaut de Toulouse", *Restitution et création dans la remise en spectacle des œuvres des XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. J.-N. Laurenti, *Annales de l'ACRAS*, n.4 (2010), pp.82-101.

<sup>2</sup> Three instruments signed by Vincent Tibaut are known: the oldest, dated 1679, is currently in the collections of the Museum of Musical Instruments (MIM) in Brussels. The second, dated 1681, belongs to Mr Guillou; restored and appreciated by harpsichordists, it was used for several recordings. The Musée de la Musique de Paris owns the last one dated 1691. While the first two harpsichords underwent major transformations to keep them in good working order, the Tibaut 1691 has most of its original elements. See Florence Gétreau, Alain Anselm, "Vincent Tibaut de Toulouse, ébéniste et facteur de clavecin", *Musique-Images-Instruments*, vol.2 (1996), pp.196-209.

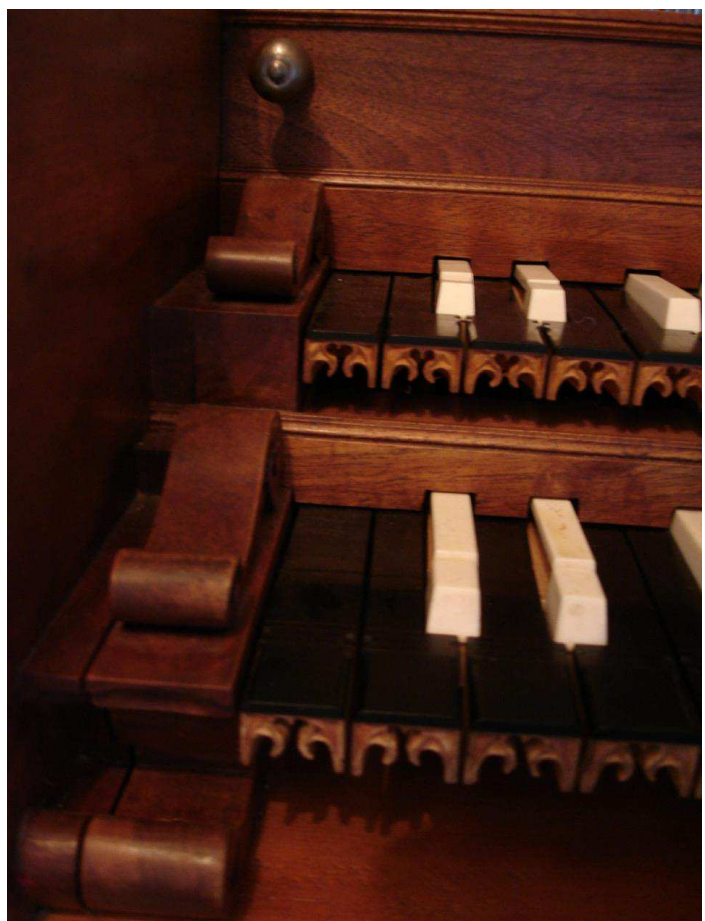
<sup>3</sup> See Émile Jobin, "Les enseignements posthumes et très modernes d'un maître vraiment ancien ou quelques expériences réalisées grâce à la construction d'un fac-similé et d'une copie du clavecin de Vincent Tibaut 1691 du musée de la Musique", *Acoustique et instruments anciens. Factice, musiques et science*, ed. L. Espié and V. Gibiat, Cité de la Musique / Société française d'Acoustique, Paris, 1999, pp.179-193.

### The lowest notes of the keyboard

Several features of his harpsichords testify to Tibaut's interest in the lower range of the instrument:

- In the 1691 harpsichord, Tibaut dug resonators into the lower part of the wrest plank, under the veneers. Thus he obtained two vibrating bridges which made it possible to improve the sound of the lower notes by favouring their first harmonics.
- Tibaut's instruments have a fifty-two note compass, a range of GG/BB-c<sup>3</sup>, with split sharps; the keys of the lowest accidentals (Eb and C#) are divided into two parts, in order to provide the use of seven different notes under the E. At the end of the 17th century, such broken octaves were relatively uncommon in France.

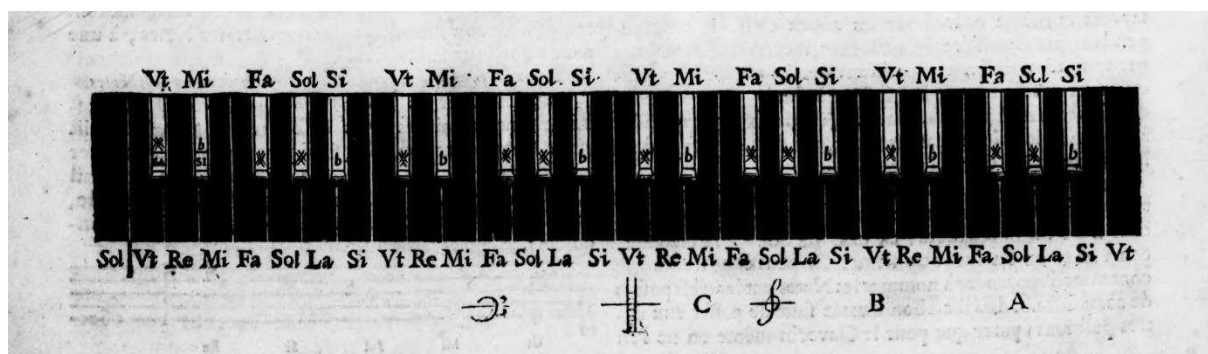
Of the eighty or so surviving harpsichords from this period<sup>4</sup>, fewer than fifteen have (or used to have) a split sharp on the Eb key, and very few have two split sharps. However, it is a keyboard with a short octave and two split sharps, like Tibaut's, which is represented in the first complete harpsichord method published in France by M. de Saint-Lambert in 1702 (ill.1). In the text, Saint-Lambert points out that these split keys are not the same on all instruments, depending on who is tuning, but that the ordinary practice is to make them AA/C# and BB/Eb.



*The short octave with two split keys on the 'Tibaut' harpsichord in the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris. (reproduced by kind permission of Émile Jobin.)*

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<sup>4</sup> For a list of known 17<sup>th</sup> century French harpsichords, see Alain and Marie-Christine Anselm, "Petit prélude à l'étude des clavecins français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Musique-Images-Instruments*, vol.2 (1996), pp.227-230; R. Dean Anderson, "Extant Harpsichords Built or Rebuilt in France during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: An Overview and Annotated List", *Early Keyboard Journal (Journal of the Southeastern Historical Keyboard Society)*, 19 (2001), pp.69-171; 20 (2002), pp.107-195.



Ill.1: Saint-Lambert, *Les Principes du clavecin*, Paris: Ballard, 1702, p.6: keyboard of the harpsichord  
 [Library of Congress: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/muspre1800.100554>]

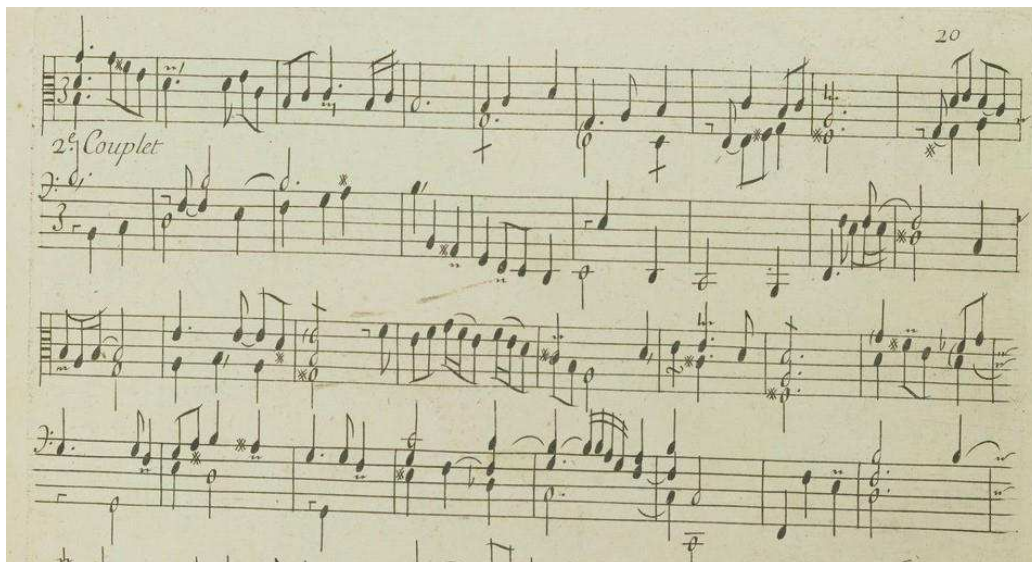
I thought it would be interesting to compare the way Tibaut favoured the lower range with the harpsichord repertoire of the end of the 17th century, assuming that the choices made by the harpsichord makers would respond to the needs of harpsichordists.

And yet a look at the pieces published in France between 1670 (Jacques Champion de Chambonnières' harpsichord books) and 1717 (François Couperin's 2nd book) and at the manuscript work of Louis Couperin, reveals that the use of the lowest notes of the keyboard is very limited in harpsichord repertoire. Until the end of the 1680s, i.e. in the works of Louis Couperin, in the two books of Chambonnières (1670), those of Nicolas Lebègue (1677, 1687), that of Perrine (1680) and the first book published by Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre (1687), the notes of the short octave are required only very occasionally, and in a small number of pieces. This is also the case in harpsichord music published in the early 18th century, such as that of Louis Marchand (1702-1703) and Jean-François Dandrieu (ca1704). The short octave is mostly used in cadences or pedals, to make the lower octave of G, A and B sound, like in this *Allemande La Loureuse* by Jacques Champion de Chambonnières (Ill.2): the AA reinforcing the dominant of the final cadence is the only one in the whole piece. Performing this music without the lowest keys, for example on a C-c3 keyboard, does not require major adjustments of the score.



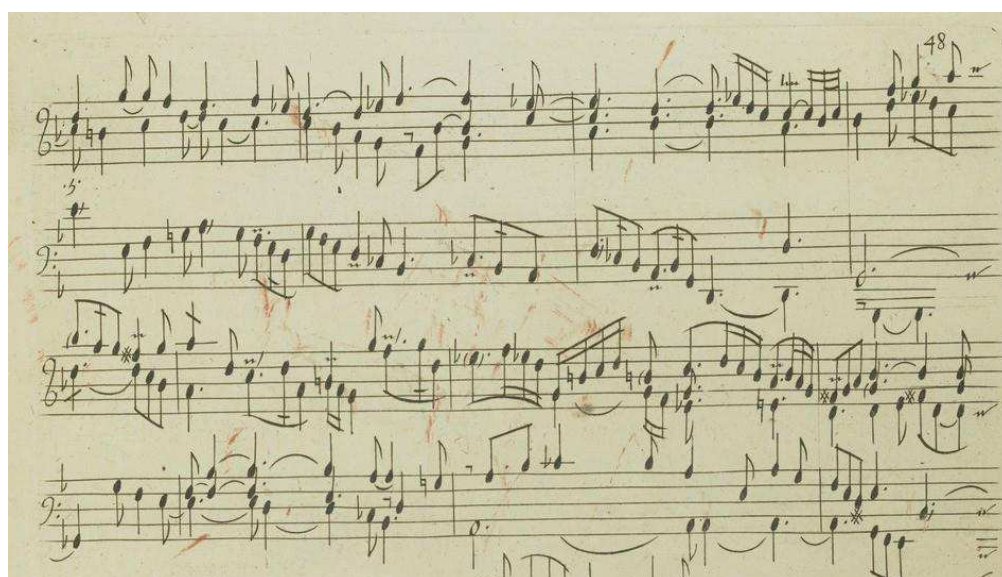
Ill. 2 : Jacques Champion de Chambonnières (*livre I*, Paris, 1670), *Allemande La Loureuse* (end)  
 [Bibliothèque nationale de France: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k991343q/f27.item>]

It is in Jean Henry d'Anglebert's book (1689) where the notes of the short octave are most frequently used: the harpsichordist needs the GG and AA in almost all the pieces. These notes contribute to the fullness of d'Anglebert's music, characterised by large chords and numerous ornaments. The composer continues to use the short octave to reinforce the structural notes, but he also gives them a more melodic role: in the *Chaconne en Rondeau* in G major, the bass line is sometimes played by the harpsichord's lower notes (Ill.3, mes. 6-7).



Ill.3 : Jean Henry d'Anglebert, *Pieces de clavecin*, Paris, 1689, *Chaconne en rondeau, 2nd couplet*  
 [Bibliothèque nationale de France: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1280279x/f39>]

It is also in d'Anglebert's book that the usefulness of a split key appears for the first time in the printed repertoire. It is the need of the lowest accidentals (below the E) that justifies a broken octave, in which the lowest sharps are divided in order to provide both the short octave and the accidental which would be found in a chromatic octave: BBb, C# and/or Eb. Of all the harpsichord books published in Paris in the seventeenth century, only d'Anglebert's requires a BBb once in the gigue of the second suite, in G minor (Ill.4).

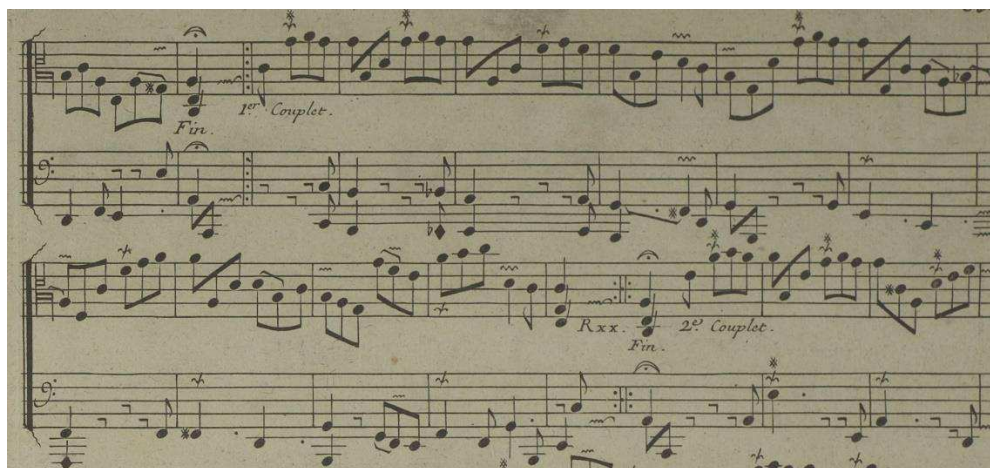


Ill.4 : Jean Henry d'Anglebert, *Pieces de clavecin*, Paris, 1689, *Gigue : BBb mes.4*  
 [Bibliothèque nationale de France: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1280279x/f67>]

The sarabande of the same suite calls for a BB, again only once, but we can assume that a split key or a chromatic compass would facilitate the execution of this suite. In Louis Couperin's music, composed in the mid-seventeenth century, we find many BB and BB $\flat$ ; like in d'Anglebert's pieces, these notes are never required in the same works. So that the harpsichordist can tune the Eb key to sound BB or BB $\flat$  according to the requirements of individual pieces. In this context, the need for split keys in the seventeenth-century harpsichord repertoire seems rather thin, at least according to surviving scores. Moreover, composers seem to consciously adapt their music to keyboards without broken octave, avoiding C# and Eb even though these notes belong to the key of the piece: for example, Louis Couperin's Gigue 33 (Brunold/Moroney numerotation) in C minor requires E but never Eb, Allemande 58 in D major requires C but not C#. It was not until the beginning of the 18th century, with Dieupart's book published in 1701 (outside France), and then Louis-Nicolas Clérambault's book (Paris, 1704), that Eb were required more frequently and more occasionally a few C# [see annexe].

However, more often than not, harpsichord music does not require all the notes of the *ravalement*, neither the Eb or C# in the same piece: in Dandrieu's and Clérambault's suites, the presence of a Eb goes with the absence of BB or BB $\flat$ , which leaves the possibility of playing them with a harpsichord without split sharps, adapting the tuning of the short octave. Most of the harpsichord music printed in France in the first two decades of the eighteenth century can therefore be performed on a GG/BB - c3 keyboard with a single split key. In the repertoire considered in this article, only the books by Jacquet de la Guerre (book II, 1707) and François Couperin use - very occasionally - the possibilities offered by two split keys.

In Couperin's first book, one piece is an exception: *La Bandoline*. In the key of A minor, this rondeau is composed in a rather low range (the right hand is entirely notated in alto clef). The notes of the short octave are regularly played, but in addition to the GG, AA, BB and BB $\flat$ , the harpsichordist will need an FF like in the first *couplet* (Ill.5). These lower notes are required to reinforce the F, G, A, B or B $\flat$  in the lowest octave, like a 16' stop, so one can imagine playing the piece without these octaves on a keyboard with a smaller range. But the fact that Couperin specifies these octaves implies that he played his music on a keyboard up to the FF-d $^3$  or e $^3$  with chromatic compass, or with two split keys (allowing BB, BB $\flat$  and Eb, required in Couperin's first book).



Ill.5 : F. Couperin, *Pièces de clavecin. Premier livre, Paris, 1713, La Bandoline, 1st couplet*  
 [Bibliothèque nationale de France: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525017311/f77>]

This sparing use of the lowest notes and more particularly of the lowest accidentals in the harpsichord repertoire - even though makers like Tibaut tried to favour the instrument's lower range - implies that the use of these notes was not limited to what the scores tell us. Printed music was intended to be played on as many instruments as possible; it was therefore expected that they

would be suitable for the most common keyboard GG/BB-c<sup>3</sup>. Harpsichordists playing an instrument like the Tibaut would have made more use of these GG, AA, BB, BBb, Eb or C#, doubling structural notes in cadences, or underlying an expressive melody – the musician adapts his performance to the specificities of the instrument.

When realising a continuo part, the accompanists would enjoy a harpsichord with a sumptuous bass range, allowing reinforcement of the chords with lower octaves, or to transpose the bass part as recommended by Saint-Lambert in his *Nouveau traité de l'accompagnement* (1707): 'However, the Accompanist is not obliged to follow the progress of the Basso Continuo scrupulously. [...] He may even raise or lower the whole Bass by an Octave for several bars in succession, either to conform more closely to the character of the singing voice, or to suit the quality of his instrument'<sup>5</sup>.

### Coupler and dogleg jack

An analysis of the keyboard frames and of the upper-manual jacks of the Tibaut 1691, while making the copy for the CNSMDP, revealed to Jobin traces which suggest that this harpsichord was originally disposed without a shove coupler, but instead with a dogleg jack. With this system, the upper-manual jacks rest directly on the lower-manual: this saves the weight of the upper-manual when playing both registers on the lower-manual. For the harpsichordist, the keyboard is lighter to play. In the 18th century, the dogleg was removed and a coupler was added to this harpsichord.

In 18th-century French harpsichords, the keyboards can be used independently thanks to the shove coupler, which allows the harpsichordist six different registrations on an instrument with two 8' tops and one 4'. On the Tibaut of 1691



*Tibaut 1691 (Musée de la Musique de Paris) : [https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/doc/IFD/OAI\\_CIMU\\_ALOES\\_0160632](https://mimo-international.com/MIMO/doc/IFD/OAI_CIMU_ALOES_0160632)*

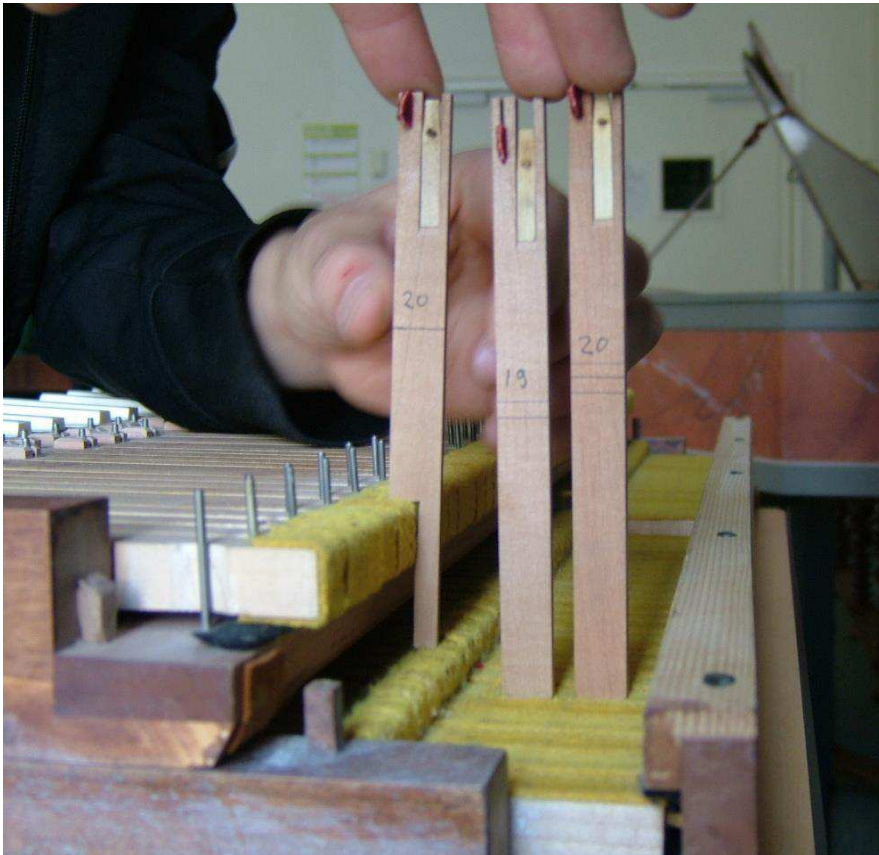
there is no indication that the upper-manual could be separated from the lower, which indicates that the upper 8' could never be removed. There was a 8' stop 'principal' shared by both manuals, and the possibility of adding a 4' stop and another 8' when playing on the lower-manual. This

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<sup>5</sup> Saint-Lambert, *Nouveau traité de l'accompagnement*, Paris: Ballard, 1707, chap.VIII: *Cependant l'Accompagnateur n'est pas obligé de suivre scrupuleusement le progrès de la Basse-Continuë. Il peut descendre quand elle monte, ou monter quand elle descend comme il le juge à propos; [...] Il peut même monter ou descendre toute la Basse d'une Octave pendant plusieurs mesures de suite, soit pour se conformer davantage au caractere de la voix qui chante, soit pour s'accommoder à la qualité de son instrument.*



principle is reminiscent of the Flemish instruments, very popular in France<sup>6</sup>, which usually consisted of a single manual with a 8' stop plucking the left string, like the upper-manual of the Tibaut, and a 4'. On the Tibaut, the second 8' stop of the lower-manual gives more strength to the whole and allows three different registrations. This arrangement of registers also corresponds to the disposition of the French choirs of this period, where the small choir of soloists, which sings continuously, can be joined by a large choir, for contrasting and stereophonic effects.



The *pièces croisées* which require two independent manuals are rare in the 17th-century French repertoire, which supports this hypothesis of a dogleg jack where the upper-manual 8 sounds from the lower manual as well. This layout invites a different approach to playing the 17th-century French repertoire: the most widespread custom on French harpsichords (in the eighteenth-century coupler tradition) is to play the lower 8' first, to which is added sometimes the upper 8', sometimes the 4', or both; in the opposite, considering the upper 8' as the main stop of the instrument invites us to play and to listen to this music in a different way.

*Demonstration of the dogleg jack from the 'Tibaut' harpsichord in the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris. (reproduced by kind permission of Émile Jobin.)*

All this shows us how much contact with ancient instruments like Tibaut's can modify our way of understanding and playing the 17th century repertoire. Let us hope that the conditions necessary for the production of facsimiles of historic harpsichords can be met regularly in the years to come and allow rich exchanges about other repertoires.

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<sup>6</sup> See Florence Gétreau, "La vogue des clavecins anversois en France. XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles", *Hans Ruckers († 1598). Stichter van een klavecimbelatelier van wereldformaat Antwerpen*, ed. J. Lambrecht-Douillez, Peer: Alamire, 1998, pp.65-75.

**Annexe: Lowest notes required in French harpsichord music from  
L. Couperin to F. Couperin's 2<sup>nd</sup> book**

| <b>Books</b>  | <b>GG, AA</b>                                    | <b>Accidentals<br/>between C and E</b>                   | <b>BB or BBb</b>  |
|---|--|--|---|
| <b>L. Couperin</b> (ed. Brunold/Moroney, L'Oiseau Lyre, 1985) | GG, AA   |  | BB or BBb<br>Not in the same pieces   |
| <b>Chambonnières I (1670)</b>                                 | AA (5 pieces)                                    |  |   |
| <b>Chambonnières II (1670)</b>                                | AA (8 pieces)<br>GG (2 pieces)                   |  |   |
| <b>Lebègue I (1677)</b>                                       | GG (4 pieces)<br>AA (8 pieces)                   |  | BB (1 piece)  |
| <b>Perrine (1680)</b>   | no   |  |   |
| <b>Lebègue II (1687)</b>                                      | GG (2 pieces)<br>AA (2 pieces)                   |  | BB (3 pieces)   |
| <b>Jacquet de La Guerre I (1687)</b>                          | AA<br>GG (2 pieces)                              |  | BB  |
| <b>D'Anglebert (1689)</b>                                     | GG, AA   |  | BB (4 pieces)<br>BBb (1 piece)  |
| <b>Marchand I, 1699</b>                                       | AA   |  | BB  |
| <b>Marais, Symphonies d'Alcide (ca1693-1701)</b>              | GG, AA   |  |   |
| <b>Dieupart, Six suites pour clavecin, 1701</b>               | AA   | D# (1 piece)<br>C# (1 piece)<br>Eb<br>Not in same suites | BB  |
| <b>Marchand II (1703)</b>                                     | No   |  |   |
| <b>Clérambault I (1704)</b>                                   | GG<br>AA (1 piece)                               | Eb   |   |
| <b>Dandrieu I (1705)</b>                                      | AA (7 pieces)<br>GG (1 piece)                    | D# (1 piece)<br>Eb (3 pieces)                            |   |
| <b>Leroux (1705)</b>  | GG, AA   | Eb (3 pieces)  | BB (2 pieces)   |
| <b>Rameau I (1706)</b>  | AA   |  | BB  |
| <b>Jacquet de La Guerre II (1707)</b>                         | GG, AA   | C# (2 pieces)  | BB and BBb<br>(not in the same pieces)  |
| <b>F. Couperin I (1713)</b>                                   | GG, AA<br><i>La Bandoline</i> : FF, GG<br>and AA | Eb   | BB<br>BB and BBb in <i>La Bandoline</i>   |
| <b>Siret (1716)</b>   | AA   |  | BB  |
| <b>F. Couperin II (1717)</b>                                  | GG, AA   | Eb   | BB (VIII <sup>th</sup> , XII <sup>th</sup> ordres)<br>BBb (VI <sup>th</sup> , VII <sup>th</sup> , IX <sup>th</sup> )<br>XI <sup>th</sup> ordre: BB and BBb,<br>not in the same pieces |

**Marie Demeilliez**

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*See Sounding Board No 2, June 2010 for Stefan Claessens' article on building a copy of a Vincent Tibaut, harpsichord . See <https://www.harpsichord.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/IssueTwoJUNE10.pdf>*