

**Elizabeth Claude Jacquet de la Guerre:
‘The Marvel of our Century’
Celebrating Elizabeth Claude Jacquet de la
Guerre (ca.1664/5-1729)**

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‘For four years a wonder has appeared here. She sings at sight the most difficult music. She accompanies herself, and others who wish to sing, at the harpsichord, which she plays in an inimitable manner. She composes pieces and plays them in all the keys asked of her. I have told you that for four years she has been appearing with these extraordinary qualities and she is still only ten years old’.¹

Versailles. Three hundred years after its completion, no other single location conveys to the modern visitor the opulence, extravagance and indulgence of the Eighteenth century. In the searing heat of an August visit, weaving through the snaking lines of waiting tourists, the air filled with the sounds of jingling, gaudy metal trinkets, the calls of the sellers and the crying of impatient children, one finds it a challenge to cast the mind back three and a half centuries, to the day when Elizabeth-Claude Jacquet was presented to the court of Le Roi Soleil.

Yet, scarcely older than the children waiting in line with their increasingly impatient parents, the young Jacquet was brought to audience with Louis XIV as precocious musical prodigy whose family was keen to garner the support and

¹ Julie-Anne Sadie and Rhia Samuel, eds., *The Norton/Grove dictionary of women composers* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1995) 236, (quoting *Mercurie Galant*, December 1678).



Figure 1: François de Troy, ‘Elizabeth Claude Jacquet de la Guerre’ (ca 1704). (private collection)

financial security a position at court would bring for the child.²

While perhaps uncomfortable in our times, raised as we are with the Victorian cult of childhood as a cosseted, indulged existence, the concept of using a child prodigy to raise the family fortunes was standard practice through much of history. Indeed the ‘exploitation’ of young talent continues unabated. A plethora of Youtube videos, reality television and other mass media simply bring the child in question to the wider world, instead of to a select audience. Perhaps the most celebrated of all child prodigies, Mozart, a century after Jacquet’s birth, was praised by his father for jumping into the lap of Marie Theresia of Austria, following a private performance at Schönbrunn.

But Jacquet was more than a performing prodigy. She would develop into one of the outstanding talents of her generation and a model for female composers to emulate.

Family life and background

As members of the bourgeoisie, the Jacquet family enjoyed certain privileges that would have been the envy of other musicians. The family itself was one of professional musicians for several generations on the Jacquet side, with Elizabeth-Claude’s father, Claude, being both an organist and organ builder. Indeed, the penchant for building seemed to have been a family tradition. Several Jacquet ancestors were masons, with an early reference being made to Matthieu Jacquet being commissioned by Henri IV to decorate, through the construction of a massive fireplace, the Guard Room of the then primary royal residence at Fontainebleau.³

As with many aspects of social life in France during the *ancient regime*, musicians fell into specific hierarchies. These were clearly defined, most notably by François Couperin in his compositions for harpsichord, *Les Fastes de la grande et ancienne Ménestrandise* (1716-1717). At the top of the social ladder were found the composers, especially those tied

2 The exact age of Jacquet’s presentation at court is disputed, with some sources, such as Évrard Titon de Tillet (1677-1762, French writer, known for his biographies of musicians in his “Parnasse”) indicating she was as old as 15 when she first performed at Versailles.

3 Paul F. Rice, *Performing Arts at Fontainebleau from Louis XIV to Louis XVI*. (Ann Arbor/London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 19.

to court or specifically assigned to an ecclesiastical setting, such as the *Chapelle*. Below them would be found singers, most notably those who performed primarily as vocal soloists and in a secondary thespian role (such as those who appeared on stage for the *Académie de Musique*).⁴

Below these would be harpsichordists, instrumentalists (especially string players, who had a significant rise in status from the ascendancy of Lully in the 1660s) and following those, oboists and hurdy-gurdy players, whose performances at weddings and lower-class celebrations rendered them the musical “untouchables” of the era.

In reality, however, instrumentalists often held several different posts and the same person could carry out diverse, yet related musical professions. Claude Jacquet supplemented his work as an organ and harpsichord builder with that of the prestigious post of organist at Saint-Louis-en-l-Ile from 1686.⁵ He also served as instructor of music to his four children; Nicolas (1662-1707), Elizabeth– Claude, Pierre (1666-1739) and Anne (ca 1662-?)⁶ as well as another *enfant célèbre*, Louis-Claude Daquin (1694 – 1772).⁷

Financially as well, the occupation of instrument builder could be a lucrative one. Costs of larger instruments, such as harpsichords and organs could be significant, while even those of lutes and viols could represent a significant amount. Costs incurred by the Jacobean court during this period indicate that the purchase of top quality instruments could claim as much as the entire salary earned by a labourer in a year.⁸

With this consideration and the long-established reputation of the Jacquet family as master masons and instrument builders, as well as celebrated performers, there is no reason to suppose that the family was by any means destitute. Certainly the presentation of young Elizabeth-Claude at court and the acceptance of the family’s presence there suggests a certain financial security.

4 Curtis Price ed., *Music and Society*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993) 265.

5 Cecelia Hopkins Porter, *Five Lives in Music*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014) 44-45.

6 *Ibid.*, 47

7 *Ibid.*, 45.

8 Price, *Music and Society*, 281.

Friends and Relations of the Jacquets

The prospect of presentation at court may have been less daunting when considered in light of the “networking” possibilities of the musical circles of Paris. The Jacquet family may have had their way eased to a certain extent by the large circle of friends and relations (both immediate and distant) who already had ties at court. These families included the Chabanceaus, Daquins (of which the above mentioned Louis – Claude was a member) and the de la Barres.

The ties were often complex, as in the case of Elizabeth-Claude. In addition to her father, Claude, her half brother (by her mother, Anne de la Touche’s first marriage), Sébastien Bourlier, was a professional organist. Both her full brothers served as organists, with her brother Pierre succeeding her father at Saint-Louis-en-l’Île, while her sister Anne served in the musical establishment of Madame de Guise, in the role of harpsichordist and accompanist.

Further relations included (as mentioned) the composer Louis – Claude Daquin, who descended on his father’s side from an Italian – Jewish family that converted to Catholicism.

The relations between the musical circles were made closer through Jacquet’s marriage at age nineteen, to Marin de la Guerre, also an organist and a member of an organ building dynasty.

But, however strong the musical connection, the young Jacquet would have never had the opportunity to remain at court were it not for her precocious musical talents. While there is no way of knowing what she may have performed upon her presentation to the royal audience, it is certain that she made enough of an impression to be taken into the court establishment. There she was assimilated into the group of other children demanding “special attention”, most notably the ever increasing circle of “natural” children of the royal household.

Life at court

Life at the glittering court of Louis XIV, even while based in Paris itself⁹ would have been worlds away from Jacquet’s home

9 The court did not move to Versailles until 1682.

life in the busy streets of Ile-de-la-Cite. She was given, at least in a nominal sense, a mother figure on Madame du Montespan, who since the late 1660s had been Queen in all but name, serving as the principal mistress of the King. This was by no means an unusual arrangement, with royal mistresses being a common practice, and their offspring being raised at court along with their “legitimate” siblings.

Under the patronage of the king and the guidance of Montespan, Elizabeth Claude would have, in all likelihood, received musical instruction along with the children of the blood. Louis XIV was intent on creating a state which would dazzle, artistically for several reasons, both political as well as his own genuine interest in the arts, most notably dance and therefore music. Central to this policy was the establishment of academies to promote artistic endeavours and provide a benchmark for activities throughout the kingdom. It was also vital to the process that the greatest creative minds of the era were expected to provide their services at court. In keeping with this practice, the musical establishment at Versailles was extensive and included some of the greatest names of the era.

All considerations of ‘quality’ aside, the French court was unparalleled simply for the sheer number of musicians. Jacquet would certainly have been initially overwhelmed by the number and variety of ensembles. While it was expected that musicians from various groups within the household may serve in more than one ensemble as required, musical activities and spheres of influence were clearly indicated.

The three delineations of court musicians were those of the Chapelle, Chamber and Ecurie;

La Chapelle

Musicians primarily associated with La Chapelle would have been required to perform for the religious services of the court and fell under the direct supervision of the *sous-maitre*, who, in addition to his administrative services of selecting music for the significant number of masses etc. at court was also responsible for the training of children within the royal choirs.¹⁰

¹⁰ Price, *Music and Society*, 246.

The organ was the primary instrumental force for the Chapelle and the position of organist was a highly coveted one. Before 1678, the post was usually held by one individual, but following the death of Joseph de la Barre (who served in the position from 1656) the decision was made to divide the post into quarters, with each organist serving a three month term. The role of organist moved beyond the keyboard, however, into accompanying the various choirs and providing musical support for the masses themselves.¹¹

Through the mid- to late baroque, orchestral instruments were used to provide increased colour and texture to sacred music at court. This coincided with the employment of singers, including women, from the Paris stages and a general secularization of the musical style employed for religious services.

The Chambre

While the *sous-maître* held the spiritual musical requirements of court under his control, the music of the Chambre was in many ways (in the early years of the reign of Louis XIV) of equal or greater importance to him. As a passionate and an accomplished dancer in his youth, as well as a devotee of music in general, Louis and his entourage encouraged secular music by making it a vital part of their daily lives.

But it was not merely the King who held his own musical establishment. The Queen, royal mistresses, and even Anne of Austria, the Queen Mother, had their own groups of musicians. Later in Louis' reign, the Duchesse de la Maine was renowned for her entertainments at her home, the Château at Sceaux.¹²

Of these groups and as to be expected, the official musicians of the King were held in highest regard. The musicians of the Chambre fell under the direct supervision of the *Surintendant*, of which there were two until the rise of Jean-Baptiste Lully in the late 1660s.

These musicians would have comprised singers (including several women, the most notable of whom would have been Anne Chabanceau de la Barre, 1628-1688), harpsichordists and diverse

11 Ibid., 248.

12 Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., *Women making music: The Western Art Tradition*. (University of Illinois, 1987) 196.

instrumentalists. These instrumentalists would then have been divided into sub categories, of which the Petite Bande (21 Violins – meaning members of the viol family) and the Vingt-Quarte violins du Roi (a larger string ensemble consisting of six violins, as well as three each of the inner viol family voices and six bass instruments). From 1655, there was also a conductor for the ensemble, no doubt to assist in the coordination of the increasingly complex musical and stage productions required at court.¹³ These musicians would have fulfilled various functions, including forming the core of opera orchestras, performing for special occasions and during meals. The most honoured of them would also have been expected to perform during private concerts in the King's chambers, occasionally alongside members of the nobility. Jacquet would have fallen into this category.

The Ecurie

While string instruments were formed into these two ensembles, the wind instruments and percussion found their home in the Ecurie. The term, which loosely means “stables”¹⁴ would have traditionally meant those instrumentalists which would have performed in either a military capacity (such as trumpeters, drummers, bagpipe and fife players) or as part of celebratory events. They would frequently perform on horseback, for foreign delegations, tournaments, and for the hunt. The group had evolved from the time of François I, when the term had initially been used, to comprise a wind band including Trumpets, oboes, sackbuts, bagpipes, crumhorns and bassoons.

Musical life at court would consist of several performance opportunities each day. A typical day at court may comprise two masses or church services, performances at meals and an operatic or theatrical performance in the evening. Should there not be a large-scale production scheduled, it would be expected that the King, Queen or one of the royal mistresses would host a private concert, perhaps with dancing and almost certainly cards, in their chambers. In addition, there would be musical instruction, rehearsals and coordination of activities

13 Price, *Music and Society*, 252.

14 Though according to the Collins Williams' dictionary it can also be translated as “pigsty”!

within the various musical factions. All this served several functions; to entertain the enormous numbers of people associated with the court, provide representation of the cultural standing of the nobility, as well as a display for foreign guests and dignitaries of the cultural glory of both France in general and the Royal sphere in particular.

In his research of the musical activities at Fontainebleau, Paul Rice references a letter from Elizabeth–Charlotte of Bavaria to her sister Wilhemine–Ernestine, the Electress Palatine, from December of 1682, which gives some indication of what a royal visitor or member of the court may expect of an evening in the royal chambers:

‘All the members of the court assemble in the King’s antechamber, and all the ladies meet at six o’clock in the Queen’s room. Then they all go together into the drawing room, of which I have just spoken. From there, they go into a large chamber, where there are violins playing for those who wish to dance. The King’s throne is in the next room and here there is every sort of music, including concertos and choral singing. The next room is the bedroom, where there are three tables for card playing,.....Those who do not play, like me and many others, wander about from one room to another, sometimes listening to the music and sometimes watching the gaming – in fact, one is allowed to do whatever one likes. This goes on from six o’clock until ten o’clock, when everyone goes to supper.’¹⁵

Artistic events at Fontainebleau would have been indicative of the Sun King at his most relaxed and provide a keen insight into the artistic happenings at court. Many of this information was recorded in the *Mercure Galant*, the *Gazette de Paris* and other newspapers of the day. As a sample, one can look to the first year of Louis’ reign, where celebrations included weekly balls, concerts for promenades, boating expeditions and fanfares.¹⁶

Rice quotes the *Gazette* of 30 July 1661, stating ‘sur la terrasse qu’Elle a fait faire à l’entour de Iardin du Tybre: où Elle fut divertie par un charmant Concert de 36 violins’.¹⁷

The musical activity at court was of the highest level and

15 Rice, *Performing Arts*, 43.

16 *Ibid.*, 53-55.

17 Rice, *Performing Arts*, 54.

exceptional instruction was required in order to ensure that standards were maintained. The Royal household boasted some of France's most celebrated musicians, including Jean Rebel (d. 1692), André Danican Philidor (1647-1730), Jean-Henri D'Anglebert (1635-1691) and Marin Marais (1656-1728). Eclipsing all was the figure of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), the upstart Italian who had worked his way through the establishment and directly to the heart of the King's artistic sensibilities. His position of *Surintendant* ensured not only his own virtual monopoly on the performance of operatic and dramatic works with music, but also the creation and dissemination of the "pure" French style, which had been under attack by Cardinal Mazarin and his pro-Italian faction in the 1650s

The King's offspring, then had instruction at the highest level. From his first significant mistress, Louise de la Vallière, he sired a daughter who studied with D'Anglebert, while two of his children by Montespan received instruction from Lland and Couperin.¹⁸ It is interesting to note that Couperin's daughter, the talented Marguerite-Antoinette, was selected by Louis XV to be harpsichord instructor to his children – a case of joining both musical and imperial dynasties.¹⁹

In addition to her great fortune in hearing such celebrated musicians, Jacquet would have been given opportunity to perform, perhaps at Versailles itself, but certainly at the residence of Montespan, the chateau of Meudon.²⁰ There, the accompaniment skills she possessed would have been put to use, either accompanying her own singing, or attached to the royal favourite. Most notably, however, she would have dazzled with her skills as an improviser, for which the young musician was especially celebrated.²¹

But on equal footing with her skills at the keyboard was her increasing reputation as a composer of promise. The earliest reference to her compositions appears in the *Mercure Galant* of 1677 which states that she had already been composing pieces and in 1678 refers to her composition of a "small opera of sorts".²²

Under the direct guidance of the above mentioned

18 Bowers and Tick, *Women Making Music*, 197.

19 Ibid., 197.

20 Porter, *Five Lives in Music*, 49.

21 Ibid., 48.

22 <http://www.hoasm.org/VIID/DeLaGuerre.html>, accessed August 20, 2014.

composers, as well as relishing opportunities to assimilate musical styles through performance and listening, it is not surprising the mature composer possessed such an individual style.

Marriage, motherhood and mourning

As was common practice for the period, Elizabeth-Claude Jacquet relinquished her position at court following her marriage of Marin de la Guerre (1658-1704) in 1684. In marrying de la Guerre, Elizabeth was continuing the long established tradition of cementing relations between musical families. At seven years older than his bride, Marin de la Guerre was established as a member of a long-respected musical family. His professions, as harpsichordist and harpsichord teacher, were perfectly compatible with his new wife's. In addition, he also held the position of organist at Saint Séverin church (a post formerly held by his elder brother Jérôme and before them, their father). For the last several years of his life, he served as organist at Saint Chapelle (du Palais), one of the most coveted positions in the musical establishment.²³

The return to Paris, however, did not mean a retirement from music-making in general. She hosted a salon of private concerts at her home, provided instruction to pupils, including her godson Louis-Claude Daquin and her own son.

As Titon du Tillet states

...her merit and reputation....could only grow in that great City and all the great musicians and fine connoisseurs went eagerly to hear her play the harpsichord; she had, above all, a marvellous talent for playing preludes and fantasies on the spot. Sometimes she would follow a prelude and fantasy for an entire half hour with melodies and harmonies that were extremely varied and in excellent taste, which charmed the Listeners. One could say that never did a woman have such skills in composition²⁴

23 Ibid., 50.

24 Évrard Titon du Tillet "Parnassus" as quoted in Porter, *Five Lives in Music*, 49.

The domestic tranquillity was to be short-lived, however, with a series of tragic deaths in short succession; her mother in 1698, her father in 1702, and both her husband and her only son, age ten, in 1704. This last tie must have been a particularly hard loss, as both a mother and musician. Not only was he her sole offspring, but, by all accounts, a prodigy in his own right. The tribute to her memory by Titon du Tillet in *Parnasse Français* (1732) contains the following;

She had had an only son, who at eight years of age surprised those who heard him play the harpsichord, whether in performance of pieces or accompaniment, but death carried him off in his tenth year.

Widowhood did not result in a cessation of compositional activity. Indeed, composition served to keep her name in the spotlight, as well as to provide a much needed income. This, combined with teaching, private performance and the legacies she would have inherited from both sides of her family, would have ensured her a comfortable middle-class²⁵ lifestyle.

The music of Jacquet de la Guerre – an overview

While a rarity in the eighteenth century, women composers did exist and evidence of their compositions (if only a scant few of the compositions themselves) is scattered through letters, diaries, newspapers, portraits and other source material of the day. Names such as Catherine de Loison (who, like Jacquet de la Guerre had her portrait painted by François de Troy), Barbara Strozzi, Wilhemine of Bayreuth and compatriot Françoise-Charlotte de Senneterre Ménétoü (1679 –1745), who usurped a moment of Jacquet’s glory by being the youngest female composer to be published by the royal music publishers, Ballard.²⁶ A student of Couperin, she was the inspiration for his composition “La Ménétoü”. She had the privilege of performing for Louis XIV at age nine, who rated her playing as “délicieuse”²⁷

25 While placing her in such a social strata, the term “middle-class” itself would not have been known to Jacquet de la Guerre, or others of her era. The phrase first appears in print only in the mid 1740’s. See Bill Bryson, *At Home*. (London: Transworld publishers, 2011).

26 Alan Curtis, *Music Classique Française à Berkeley*. In *Revue de Musicologie* 56 (1970), 154-158.

27 Julie-Anne Sadie, *Companion to baroque music*. (Oxford: Oxford University

A more celebrated contemporary of Jacquet de la Guerre was the Italian composer Antonia Bembo, who served the French court from about 1690 till 1710. During this time she composed arias and cantatas, two *Te Deums*, the opera *L'Ercole amante* (c. 1707) and a setting of *Les Sept Psaulmes de David* (1710).²⁸

While female composers were a rarity at court, there was a plethora of celebrated performers of the day immortalised by their contemporaries. An example would be Marie le Rochois, creator of many of the female leads in Lully's operas, as well as those of other composers in the circle. Once again, we can turn to Titon du Tillet, who describes the soprano thus:

The greatest performer and the most perfect model for declamation who had appeared on stage²⁹ ... she understood marvellously well that which is called the *ritournelle*, which is played while the actress enters and presents herself to the audience, as in pantomime, in the silence, all the feelings and passions should be painted on the performer's face and be seen in her movements, something that great actors and actresses have not often understood. When she would become passionate and sing, one would notice her only on stage.³⁰

Le Rochois served as *première actrice* at the Académie Royale from 1678 to 1698 and the assumption can be drawn that she may have had a role in Jacquet's *Cephale et Procris*.³¹

Jacquet de la Guerre was in the fortunate position of enjoying a life of royal patronage, meaning that there was a ready audience for her compositions, not only at court, but among those who wished to be considered as part of the cultural inner circle. This popularity depended greatly upon Louis XIV, and his evident pride in his protégée, as well as her unconcealed devotion is evidenced by the preface to her

Press, 1998), 325.

28 <http://www.sscm-jscm.org/v14/no1/cabrini.html>. ISSN: 1089-747X. Accessed July 29 2014.

29 While acclaimed as a great singer and actress, Titon du Tillet takes pains to point out her physical "imperfections" stating that "Even though she was fairly short, very dark and looked very ordinary outside the theatre, with eyes close together which were, however, large, full of fire, and capable of expressing all the passions, she effaced all the most beautiful and more attractive actresses when she was onstage...."

30 Isabelle Putnam Emerson, *Five Centuries of Women Singers*, 51 as accessed on Google Books, August 20, 2014.

31 *Ibid.*, 55.

1691 ballet ‘Les jeux à l-honneur de la victoire.’ While the music has been lost, the libretto remains and contains the following dedication:

When this play was presented to me, I was at once extremely eager to undertake it. Everything having your Majesty’s glory as its end is marvellously exciting; and when the desire to please you is joined to it, what further aim could one have? It is by such a just incentive that I have always been prompted to work. From the most tender age (this memory will be eternally precious to me) presented to your illustrious court, where I have had the honour to work for several years, I Learned, Sire, to consecrate to you all of my waking hours. You deigned at that time to accept the first fruits of my gifts, and it has pleased you to receive several further productions. But these particular marks of my zeal did not suffice for me and I welcome the happy opportunity to be able to make a public (offering). That is what led me to write this ballet for the theatre. It is not just today (but earlier) that women have written excellent pieces of poetry, which have had great success. But until now, none has tried to set a whole opera to music; and I take this advantage from my enterprise: that the more extraordinary it is, the more it is worthy of you, Sire, and the more it justifies the liberty I take in offering you this work.³²

While considered to be the first of her major works, and in apparent contrast to the implication in the preface above that she had made on previous “public” offerings, Jacquet was already a published composer several years before *Jeux*. In 1687 (a year notable for the death of Lully), she published her “*Premier Livre de Pièces de Clavessin*,” containing four suites of pieces. The works are considered to be highly imaginative and harmonically daring, while drawing on the rich musical knowledge and experience she would have garnered through her performance, study and observation at court.

As stated earlier, one of the keys to Jacquet’s early success was her skill at improvisation. As evidenced by the white notes in this typical prelude from the second suite in this first collection, the composer (or indeed the performer, or both, and in Jacquet’s initial case) would have had ample opportunity to display such skills:

Following *Jeux* came the next major composition from Jacquet de

32 Carol Neuls Bates, ed., *Women in Music: an anthology of source readings from the middle ages to the present*. (Lebanon: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 63.

la Guerre's pen, the full *tragédie en musique*, *Cephale et Procris*. This composition, while in the style of Lully, was a watermark in many ways, being the first full opera by a woman to be performed at the Académie Royale de Musique, as well as the first full opera by a French female composer.

The work, in five acts, opens with the requisite prologue, extolling the virtues of Louis XIV. It then continues in what would have been a standard Lullian format, alternating dance with aria and recitative. Notable is the "French overture" style of the opening, employing scale and dotted rhythmic patterns in the manner first established by Lully.

Modern performers may find the voicing, as well as the choice of instruments indicated in the score, difficult to comprehend. The work calls for strings, flutes, oboes, (both wind instrument sets in pairs), bassoon and trumpet.³³ While upper orchestral voices are clearly indicated as such, there are few indications of when instruments would appear as solo lines (as in the case of violins) or whether the music would be "doubled" (played by one type of instrument at the same time). In addition, modern orchestras would find the lack of an inner string voice confusing (that line which would normally be associated with the viola). Indeed, Sébastien de Brossard (1655-1730) created a third violin line for the 1696 performances in Strasbourg, allowing for a fuller realisation of the harmonies than would have been possible with the forces at hand.³⁴

In addition, few figures appear with regard to a sort of "realisation" of continuo, leading to speculation that, as in what was considered to be standard Lullian operatic performance practice, the harpsichord did not perform in every musical piece, rather filling out the harmonies only in the places where the larger ensemble was not playing, or where a more delicate texture was required.³⁵

A poem, presumably by a son of Lully, extolling the virtues of an opera by Jacquet, was published in the *Mercure Galant* of December 1691. Using highly florid language, it extols Jacquet's skill as a composer

33 Diane Jezic, *Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found* (New York: Feminist Press, 1988), as accessed at Google Books on 4 August, 2014.

34 Wanda Griffiths, "Brossard and the Performance of Jacquet de La Guerre's *Cephale et Procris*"

<http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1149&context=ppr>, accessed 3 August, 2014.

35 *Ibid.*, 36.

and reminds readers that ‘even the king must know of her genius’³⁶

While containing glorious melodies and energetic dances, the work itself was not well-received by the public. Conjecture offers several possibilities for the lukewarm reception, including the convoluted libretto (by Joseph François, Duché de Vancy)³⁷ based on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Unlike Italian opera of the period, which was primarily concerned with vocal spectacle and virtuosity, French opera of the Lullian style was much more text centred. Without the coloratura displays of the castrato to distract the audience (who had enjoyed very limited public support in Paris), the plot and phrasing, along with the requisite dance elements, became the focal point of French *ballet de cour*. There is also a certain implication that the public may have begun to tire of the Lullian style, as the iron grip of his power began to wane following his death in 1687. While his son continued to keep the family name in the spotlight, it could be that audiences were interested in a change.

Cephale et Procris may have been lost to history entirely were it not for the machinations of the composer and music collector Sébastien de Brossard arranging for the production of *Cephale et Procris* in Strasbourg, where he had recently established an Académie de la Musique³⁸. The response was enthusiastic and the work enjoyed great success. The fact that several period sources still exist of the work, may be testament to its appreciation among connoisseurs, rather than the general public.

While *Cephale* was Jacquet’s last known work for the stage, her compositional output continued with fourteen Pieces du clavecin in 1707, with the sonatas for violin and basso continuo also in that year. Interestingly, however, was her turn to the “French Cantata”, which she pursued with increased enthusiasm during her middle years. She wrote two books of cantatas, for voice with the accompaniment of violin and basso continuo (the first with solo violin, the second with two violins) in 1708 and 1711, respectively, as well as *La Musette ou les bergers de Surensin* 1713.³⁹

1715 saw the publication of a set of Cantatas on mythological

36 *Mercurie Galant* (December 1691), 239. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6310979p/f239>. Image accessed 4 August, 2014

37 Porter, *Five Lives in Music*, 64.

38 *Ibid.*, 65.

39 Jezic, *Women Composers*, 42

La Renommée en passant annonce à la France,
 Et à la Paix, le retour du Roy, pour qui Elle
 faisoient des Vœux. Mars survient, qui leur
 confirme cette heureuse Nouvelle; Et tous, Envis
 empressés à Celebrier à l'envy les dernières
 Conquestes de Sa Majesté offrent tour à tour
 des Jeux à la Victoire.

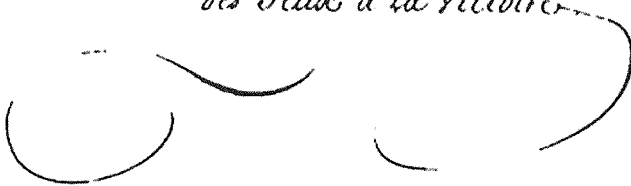


Figure 2: Excerpt from the libretto of ‘Jeux à l’honneur de la Victoire’ (printed 1691?).

subjects. Dedicated to her final celebrated patron, the Elector of Bavaria Maximilian II, these cantatas include her rendering of *Semele*, and *Le Sommeil d’Ulisse*. While dedicated to the Elector, the title page still shows the importance both Jacquet de la Guerre and the publishers attached to her continued support by Louis XIV. The phrase “Avec Privilege de Roy” features prominently at the bottom of the page. This third set differs from the earlier cantata books in that the obligato instruments are wind instruments, with significant writing for flute and bassoon, in addition to the voices, strings and basso continuo.

Nothing remains of Jacquet de la Guerre’s final composition, a *Te Deum*, written in 1721 to celebrate the restoration of health to the new King, Louis XV. It would appear that her muse had been silenced and she lived her remaining years resting on her reputation.

Mistresses, matrons and the musical establishment

At a time in which unmarried musicians and singers were routinely expected to become mistresses of their patrons, public performance by married women was considered inappropriate in most circumstances and women in general were traditionally dependant on the financial support of husbands and families, Elizabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre stands as both an exception to convention and a precursor of the *femme-compositeur* of the second part of the Eighteenth century.

As mentioned earlier, the role of a mistress was a long-accepted one in court circles. Understandable in an age when marriages were arranged as matters of state and family standing, the idea of “love” in our modern sense as a precursor to the marital state would have been regarded as detrimental to the upper echelons of society. Still, the heart would not be denied and royal or noble mistresses prevailed.

Louis XIV was no exception to this rule and the names of his most longstanding mistresses, including Montespan, Valliere and finally his morganic wife De Maintenon are well known to scholars of the *Ancien Regime*. Still, a host of lesser nobles indulged in such relationships, including Monsieur (in whose case many relationships were homosexual), the Dauphin and Phillippe d’Orleans.

While most of these men certainly abused their power and position to procure lovers, young women of the era (much as those today) would have seen the connection with the rich and powerful as a means of furthering their own careers, attaining financial security and perhaps making an advantageous marriage when their “patron” began to cast his eye on younger, more novel women. Examples of this flourish, including the celebrated singer Marie Antier.⁴⁰

Marie Antier (1687-1747) was a student of the above mentioned Marie de Rochois, but unlike her teacher, was celebrated for her “off-stage” antics, as much as the performances that spanned her thirty-year career.⁴¹ Officially named as *Maitresse en titre* to the Prince of Carignan, she married the Parisian inspector (Jean Duval) in 1726. The

40 Laura Williams Macy, ed., *Grove book of opera singers*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), 15 as accessed on Google Books, 8 August, 2014.

41 Emerson, *Five Centuries of Women Singers*, 56.

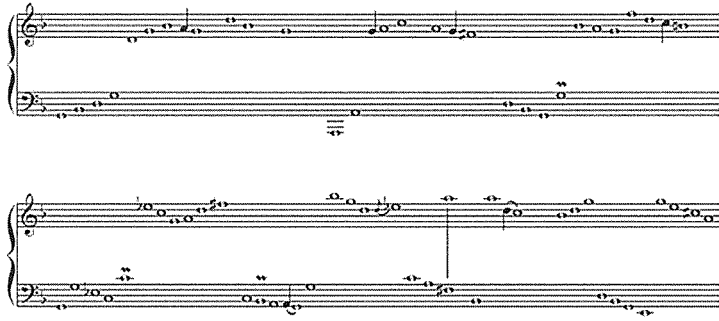


Figure 3: Excerpt from the Prelude to the Suite in g minor (1687)

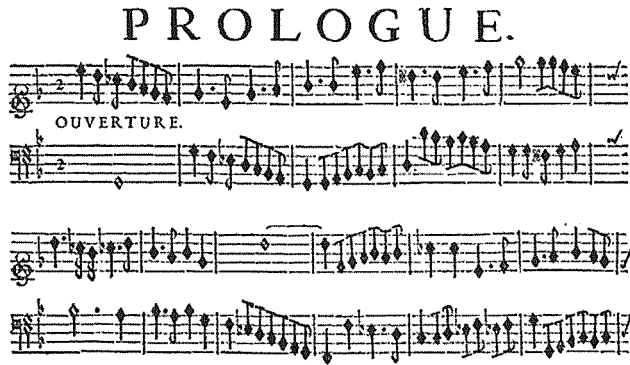


Figure 4: Excerpt from the Prelude to the Suite in g minor (1687)

Semélé
L'Île de Delos
Le Sommeil d'Ulysse
Cantates Françaises
Àuquelles on a joint
Le Racommodement Comique
Pieces mises en Musique
Par Mad^{lle} Jacquet de la Guerre
Gravées Par H. D. Bauffren. Le prix en blanc est de 5^u

A Paris
 chez { *Pierre Ribou, Marchand Libraire, quai des Augustins*
Foucault rue S^t Honoré, à la Règle d'Or
L. Autan, Me S^t Louis, au coin de la rue Regnatière

Avec Privilège du Roy

Figure 5: Title page of the third book of *Cantatas* (1715).

marriage seems to have been simply a prelude to her well publicised and shocking affair with the banker La Riche de la Pouplinière in 1727.⁴²

Antier outwardly bowed to social convention and resided in the convent of Chaillot following the scandal of her relationship with La Pouplinière, but continued to perform.⁴³ There were, however, women such as the notorious Mlle. de Maupin who refused to bend to traditions in their quest for their “fifteen minutes of fame”.⁴⁴ Maupin serves as a particularly flamboyant example of the loose morals that pervaded the court.

Born Julie d’Aubigny,⁴⁵ Maupin was five years Jacquet’s younger, the daughter of the court secretary to the Count of Armagnac. By fourteen she had not only had her first love-affair – with her father’s employer, but was then “married off” to Sieur de Maupin of Saint Germain-en-Laye. A series of love affairs with paramours of both genders ensued, and given her predilection for both sword-fighting and cross dressing, she remained a figure of both fascination and horror for the ladies of the court.

Apart from her role as a sexual opportunist, her voice was the ticket to her success. Said to be in possession of the “most beautiful voice in the world”, she created roles for Lully, Campra, Bouvard and de la Barre. Still, plagued by social scandal, she retired to the provinces after 1705.

That Jacquet de la Guerre escaped such a fate is a combination of a number of factors. Key to this would have been the respect given to her first by the King and then the Elector of Bavaria, Maximilian II,⁴⁶ who had been in exile in France and whose patronage she enjoyed later in her life. Jacquet de la Guerre would certainly have witnessed the rise and fall of many mistresses during her years at court and in her both direct and indirect affiliations with the royal household following her marriage. These would have presented valuable examples in the risks run by compromising one’s long-term standing through short term

42 La Pouplinière was a great patron of the arts and supported, among others Jean – Philippe Rameau.

43 Emerson, *Five Centuries of Women Singers*, 56.

44 While attributed to the Twentieth Century artist Andy Warhol, the term “fifteen minutes of fame” can be placed on countless “celebrities”, who through time have seen their fortunes rise and fall on the whims of patron or public”.

45 Julie-Anne Sadie, *Companion to baroque music*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 132.

46 The Elector of Bavaria was also a lover of the above mentioned Mlle de Maupin.



Figure 6: Mademoiselle de Maupin.

gains, especially for a woman who had won her reputation through her own musical talents as opposed to sexual favours.

Secondly, her financial security would have been ensured through the slow building of her family fortunes through the inheritance of properties and other businesses from both her father's firm, as well as those of her husband.

The sale of her music would have also commanded a certain amount, as would her performances and private tuition. The dedication of works to Louis XIV would have ensured good sales. The costs of printing may also not have been her responsibility, as there is evidence that the Royal presses paid these costs, as part of her financial package with the King.

Certainly by the time of her portrait sitting with François de Troy (with whom she was a part of the Montespan household), Elizabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was a financially independent woman. The portrait, painted around the time of *Cephale et Procris* shows an attractive woman, richly yet modestly attired in elegant fabrics, with instruments and manuscript at hand, a testament to her dual roles as performer and composer.

Conclusion

With interest growing in the valid but often sidelined compositions of female composers, as well as the now established move towards historically informed performances, composers such as Elizabeth Claude Jacquet de la Guerre are finally taking their rightful places in the pantheon of celebrated composers. No longer a footnote to the accomplishments of their better-known male colleagues, they are being performed, researched and recorded with ever-increasing frequency. In the 350th anniversary of her birth year, Jacquet de la Guerre is poised to finally receive the recognition due to a talent described by the British musicologist John Hawkins, as ‘so rich and exquisite a flow of harmony has captivated all that heard her’.⁴⁷

47 In his *General History of the Science and Practice of Music of 1776* as quoted in <http://www.hoasm.org/VIID/DeLaGuerre.html> accessed 20 August, 2014.