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[44]

LA MORT DE LA VIOLE EN FRANCE PENDANT LE DIX- HUITIEME SIECLE: AN ENQUIRY INTO THE VIOL'S FALL FROM GRACE

Mark Summers

The elderly viol, after having shone at court and in town at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of this one, saw the cello preferred to it,; in spite of the defence mounted by M. L'Abbe Le Blanc, Doctor of Law...she perished from pride before his very eyes and was only too glad to retire to a little lane on the Champs Elysées, where she celebrated her fiftieth birthday in perpetual silence, and without being missed by a single amateur.

Michel Corrette, 1773.¹

The later history of the viol in France can be divided into three distinct periods.² Until 1715 the instrument flourished under the influence and protection of Louis XIV; between 1715 and c1750 it went into decline; between c1750 and the Revolution in 1789, it effectively disappeared. Apart from increasingly isolated references to the unpopularity of the viol, the main evidence for its decline is the progressive reduction and eventual cessation of composition and publication of viol music: the process of publishing took time and money and would only be undertaken if a market was perceived, so the presence or absence of publications is an important indicator of taste. The last major publication for the viol, by Jean-Baptiste Forqueray in 1747, took the form of a collection of *Pièces de viole* by his father, Antoine, with new bass lines added.³ Other instruments were increasingly used in situations formerly reserved for the viol, and even music published for the viol gradually changed in character: the use of the viol in ensemble, rather than as a solo instrument, became more common,

¹ M. Corrette, *Méthode pour apprendre à jouer de la contre-basse à 3, à 4 et à 5 cordes, de la quinte ou alto et de la viole d'Orphée* (Paris, 1773; 2nd edn 1781, repr. Geneva 1977), 2.

² This article is a revision of my honours dissertation, which I also presented as a paper at the Bowed Strings Symposium at Edinburgh in June 2000. I chose the subject after finding that the question 'if the viol was so popular in France, why did it die out?' could not be adequately answered from existing sources. For a full discussion of the viol repertoire see J.-A. Sadie, *The Bass Viol in French Baroque Chamber Music* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1980); for the social aspects of musical life of the period see W. Weber, 'Learned and General Musical Taste in Eighteenth Century France', *Past and Present* 89 (November 1980), 58-85.

³ A. Forqueray, *Pièces de Viole avec la Bass Continue* (Paris, 1747; facs. Geneva, 1976).

and works such as Leclair's Op. 2 trio sonatas (1728), Rameau's *Pieces de clavecin en concerts* (1741) and Guillemain's *Sonates en quatuors* (1743), which all contain obbligato parts for the viol, have suggestions for alternative instrumentation. Further important evidence for the viol's decline includes an eccentric treatise by Hubert le Blanc,⁴ mentioned by Corrette above, which attempts to argue for its return to favour.

Until 1715 musical taste in France was dictated to a large extent by Louis XIV, who engineered a situation of Absolutism whereby the French state centred on him, the 'Sun King'. Not only did he preside over court but, unusually, took an active (at times over-active) role in politics, especially foreign affairs. Although the country was virtually bankrupted by war, there was always music in lavish quantities, and even when cutbacks eventually came at the end of his life, Louis maintained a keen interest in chamber music. His use of music, both ceremonial and private, was politically calculated to add to the pomp and splendour of his majesty.⁵ In this atmosphere the viol flourished, finding favour with the nobility and, more importantly, the King. The death of Louis XIV resulted in [45] the partial break-up of the systems of government he had instituted: the following regency discouraged centralised grand patronage and, although courtly musical life continued much as before, the Versailles court was no longer the only focus of informed taste. The city of Paris started to become the place where musical preference was formed, and an interest in new Italian forms, which had been gathering momentum since the death of Lully in 1687, now started to come to the fore.

Throughout the life of Louis XIV, however, his own views and preferences predominated. Le Cerf shows him as being appreciative of the Italians but ultimately supporting his native traditions:

he was attached to the opera of Lully, to the music and musicians of France, and since the death of Lully he has not changed his taste; he has stoutly adhered to it, though there have been some attempts to make him change it.⁶

One typically French aspect of the King's taste was his love of the viol: it was Louis XIV who instructed the five-year-old Antoine Forqueray, then an infant prodigy upon the *base de violon*, to learn the viol instead.⁷ The Sun King's influence is summed up by Henry Raynor thus:

The extent to which all these forms of music, in the theatre, the church and the concert room or the home, depended on the taste of Louis XIV and on his ability to tell good composers from their inferiors is obvious. His place in the history of music is not simply that of a patron who was lucky enough to

⁴ H. le Blanc, *Défense de la Basse de Viole contre les entreprises du violon et les prétentions du violoncel* (Amsterdam, 1740); English trans. in B. G. Jackson, 'Hubert Le Blanc's *Défense de la viole*' *JVdGSA* 10 (1973), 11-28, 69-80; 11 (1974), 17-58; 12 (1975) 14-36.

⁵ A thorough discussion of the use of music at the French court can be found in R. Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King*, (Ithaca, New York and London, 1973).

⁶ J. L. le Cerf de la Vieville, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique française* (2nd edn, 1705), in O. Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York, 1950), 489-507 at p. 506; repr. in 5 vols (New York, 1965), 111, 129-47 at p. 146.

⁷ *Mercure Galant*, April 1682, 331-2; Sadie, *The Bass Viol*, 2.

find first-rate composers and reasonable enough to pay them well, for his influence was more direct. Because he found the first-rate composers who provided the music which appealed to his own educated taste, he laid down the lines along which French music has travelled ever since.⁸

After the death of Louis XIV the dissent lying quietly under the surface at all levels of society had a chance to make itself known. The three principal heirs to the throne died within a few months of each other in 1711-12, and Louis XIV's heir became his sickly great-grandson, a boy of five. The regent, the Duc d'Orleans, was a nephew of Louis XIV but did not subscribe to the same political beliefs: Louis had tried to control the situation which would arise after his death by producing a will setting out how the country was to be governed, with a system of councils made up of his supporters, but Orleans, seeing how the principles of Absolutism could be used against such posthumous control, declared the will null and void in the name of Louis XV the new king being sovereign in his own right and not bound by the wishes of the previous monarch. Orleans had the support of the nobles, the parlements (regional law courts) and all those who were against the inflated power of the Jesuits who were a sign of the sometimes oppressive influence of the Catholic church. Having formally nullified the will in the parlements, Alfred Cobban suggests, [46] 'the regent emerged with full powers of royal absolutism but with the intention of using them to bring that absolutism to an end.'⁹

This new administration was a breath of fresh air through French society:

society followed the model set by the regent. The sanctimoniousness and dullness of the later years of *Louis XIV* were thrown off ... Gay colours, light fabrics and swinging hoops and paniers...brought lighter modes and manners along with a franker indifference to morals into high society.¹⁰

The court's symbolic move, abandoning Versailles in favour of Paris, followed the trend amongst the younger nobles of moving to the capital to escape the rigid routines, discomfort and boredom that typified Versailles life towards the end of Louis XIV's reign. Most aspects of courtly life followed and Paris became the centre of cultural attention. There being as yet no king to court, the nobility once more had time to cultivate their own tastes to the full. Musically speaking, this allowed more freedom of choice:

the King's ideas [had become] a standard because noblemen spending most of their time in ceremonial attendance on the King neglected their own musical organisations in which other, perhaps more personal, styles ... might have been cultivated.¹¹

In a world where Enlightenment theories were beginning to find a place, the intellectual climate was becoming more questioning. The parlements, too, were seeking increased influence, as Cobban says: 'by the middle of the century the parlements had succeeded in reinstating themselves as a power

⁸ H. Raynor, *A Social History of Music* (London, 1972), 233.

⁹ A. Cobban, *A History of Modern France* (Harmondsworth, 1963), I, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹ Raynor, *A Social History*, 232.

in the land'¹² Thus the country became very much less centralised, with more room for differing branches of opinion. In this atmosphere public concerts thrived, though they were still regulated by the holders of the monopolies of public performance granted by Louis XIV and by continuing strict church control on the calendar of public events: 'monopolistic practices of the *ancien regime* limited the proliferation or specialisation of musical institutions, for authorities permitted few concerts to rival the *Concert Spirituel*.'¹³

The long-established tradition of aristocrats giving concerts in their homes for selected audiences enabled tastes contrary to those prevailing to be indulged. In this way, the new Italian style found its way at first to a small group of enthusiasts; conversely, when the viol was in decline, the instrument could still be enjoyed by those whom it excited. Music also found its way into the lives of the nobility as participants, and it was for this purpose that much, if not most, of the solo viol repertoire was published, providing music to while away the hours. This was a feature of aristocratic life that continued through the changes of the eighteenth century, absorbing the new musical fashions. Private interest played an important part in the emancipation of the Italian style but it was at the public concerts that it gained ultimate acceptance: here, the taste of the general public [47] was the key to success and these concerts became the most important showcase for new music.

It is interesting to note the way in which tastes were formed from the beginning of the regency onwards. No one individual had the influence of Louis XIV or Lully (who was ruthless in his dislike of Italian music), and much of the success of new Italian styles was due to their growing popularity with the French concert-going public. Away from the court, and without a single figure to dictate taste, performers and their music were subject to the machinations of fancy and quickly changing tastes. One consequence, a noticeable move towards accepting the Italian style, had severe implications for the viol.

The measure of the worth of a piece of music was largely based on its entertainment value, the lack of a classical tradition making recourse to antique models impossible. Whereas a literary connoisseur might compare a poem of Racine to one by Virgil, no such comparison was available to the musical establishment, there being, save for a few fragments, no music surviving from ancient Greece or Rome and as a result no canon by which to judge new works. The music of immediately preceding centuries was deemed out of date (with the possible exception of Palestrina, regarded as a standard for church polyphony though his music was termed *stile antico*), and there was no sense of an academic musical tradition. Weber points out that 'music could not be learned because ultimately it had no history'.¹⁴ Connoisseurs of music could draw only on the contemporary authority of taste, an authority 'by definition intellectually weak'.¹⁵ Without the capacity

¹² Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, 1, 85.

¹³ Weber, 'Learned and General Musical Taste', 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

to claim superior learning in matters of taste, but rather a knowledge and appreciation of a wider repertoire, the relationship between the musical connoisseur and the public was different from that in any other field of learning.

'Public' here means not the twenty million inhabitants of France but the infinitely smaller band of 'people of quality, a distinguished multitude, who frequent the theatre, but who do not carry there any knowledge of the rules'.¹⁶ This lack of 'knowledge' was not seen as a hindrance ('for members of the privileged classes, ignorance did not rule out musical bliss').¹⁷ Entertainment was the key to the musical experience and, in some ways, knowledge could be seen as a double-edged sword. The very word 'connoisseur' could, depending on the context, be used as much with negative connotations as positive ones. But however they were regarded, connoisseurs did provide a link between the public and the 'special knowledge' held by the performers.

Whilst informing the public in matters of specialised taste, a connoisseur had ultimately to bow to its preferences. This hierarchy is highlighted in the anonymous *Lettres d'un amateur*:

no judge other than the public should decide the merit of a piece designed to amuse and captivate it. This truth is indeed crucial, since failure has so often [48] come to works thought excellent by pretended connoisseurs, men of taste, or theatre directors, and brought down failure and humiliation upon these same authors, pretended men of letters, and connoisseurs.¹⁸

To quote Weber, 'master musicians and connoisseurs had an authority born of their special knowledge, but they served only to inform and educate the general public, with whom the ultimate authority over taste resided'.¹⁹

Then as now, however, connoisseurs were generally able to steer public tastes in a particular direction. The connoisseurs, the first people in France to hear and appreciate Italian music, 'flaunted their knowledge as a kind of radical chic',²⁰ but the Italian style took little time to catch hold of the public's imagination. The very fact that few people were technically and aesthetically knowledgeable perhaps resulted in a public that expected to be delighted by new music and did not carry preconceptions that might affect their opinions. This public was eager for new music, latterly Italian or Italian inspired, and was bound less to the French tradition than those who sought to suppress foreign styles. They were more able to judge simply on what they heard than on any matters of nationality, though this is not to say that the nationality of the music or performers did not have any effect.

¹⁶ Le Cerf quoted in Weber, 'Learned and General Musical Taste', 67.

¹⁷ Weber, 'Learned and General Musical Taste', 66.

¹⁸ Anon., *Lettres d'un amateur* (Paris, 1776), 21, quoted in Weber, 'Learned and General Musical Taste', 67.

¹⁹ Weber, 'Learned and General Musical Taste', 67-8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

Along with the *Concerts Français* and *Concerts Italiens*, the *Concert Spirituel* represented the first attempt at regular subscription concerts in France. Of the three series, the *Concert Spirituel* was the longest running and broadest ranging (the *Concerts Français* played mainly French divertissements and cantatas while the *Concerts Italiens* ‘only performed Italian music; they were almost entirely Italian musicians, with some Frenchmen who had been in Italy’).²¹ Admission to the *Concert Spirituel*, a series started in 1725 to provide music on holy days when the opera was closed, was by purchase of tickets for sizeable sums of money. By the 1730s the net income of a year’s season sometimes exceeded 8700 livres: the profit for 1736-7 was 8717.8 livres for a total of 22 concerts,²² although this was a small return in relation to the massive outlay for musicians and for permission to perform from the holders of Lully’s monopoly. The repertoire included larger-scale works as well as chamber music.²³ To begin with, the performers were taken from the Opera, the Royal Chapel and various Paris churches but later, as more and more instrumental music was put on, Italian and Italian-trained instrumentalists were featured. The *Concert Spirituel* quickly became ‘an important forum for new music: vocal and instrumental, religious and secular’²⁴ and Italian music increased in popularity. Corelli’s Opus 6 no. 8 (the ‘Christmas Concerto’) was featured in the first concert in 1725; 1738 saw the first cello sonata; and in 1745 a concerto for pardessus was played by one Mlle Levi. Apart from the pardessus, a viol player is only mentioned in one season (1745) when Jean-Baptiste Forqueray played in a quartet by Telemann. This was a result of two factors to be explored: the unsuitability of the viol to performing in a concert [49] hall and the lack of a place for it in Italianate music.

Latterly, the sonata had made headway in the larger halls of Paris (such as the *Tuileries* where the *Concert Spirituel* was held), but was not seen as wholly appropriate for the intimate chamber music at court. The viol, however, was not suited to the concert hall environment: although with its resonant capabilities it can be heard in large spaces, it is only effective when there is very little other sound competing at the same time. French concert-going was more relaxed than today’s formality, and was more of a collective social experience than an individual one: Weber points out that ‘etiquette allowed talk, moving about, even card-playing and occasional fisticuffs, and while that may mean anarchy to us, to people of the time it comprised a controlled social interplay which was integral to musical experience’.²⁵

The viol had no way of competing with this background noise, the very nature of its sound being delicate with nuance and restrained expression paramount. Beside the robust and louder violin, the viol would never fare well in terms of audibility, its lightweight construction having much less

²¹ Titon du Tillet quoted in J. R. Anthony, *French Baroque Music from Beaujoyeux to Rameau* (rev. edn, Portland, 1997), 38.

²² C. Pierre, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel, 1725-1790* (Paris, 1975), 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 227-344.

²⁴ Anthony, *French Baroque Music*, 37.

²⁵ Weber, ‘Learned and General Musical Taste’, 71.

capacity for volume. In June 1738, the *Mercure de France*, the main journal for Paris, reported the effects of these differences, presenting an obituary for *La Viole* explaining that ‘it does not make enough sound and can hardly be heard in concerts. The basse de violon is preferred’.²⁶ Julie-Anne Sadie suggests that this was the main reason for the decline in the use of the viol: ‘Ultimately, it was the viol’s lack of sonority-so necessary when playing in large halls-which brought about its demise. The viol’s inherent versatility in the alto, tenor and bass ranges could not offer sufficient compensation’.²⁷ Other contemporary accounts support this view. Le Blanc, in describing what he saw as the battle between violin and viol, points out the viol’s particular strengths but admits that a large hall does nothing for them:

The Violin, to be sure could not contest with the Viol in the delicacy of its moving sound or its harmony, so refined in its resonance when it was heard in the proper place for examining its attributes at close range. So to allow them to make an impression, he advised moving the setting to an immense hall, where there would be many effects which were prejudicial to the Viol as they would be favourable to the Violin.²⁸

The solo repertoire of the viol was literally chamber music. Once the viol left that environment its role was principally one of accompaniment, and it was not strong enough to compete with other sounds to be heard simultaneously.

This lack of power was not the only reason for the viol’s demise. To quote Valerie Walden: ‘Need for precision of pitch, volume of sound, and matching sonority with other members of the violin family rendered the viola da gamba inevitably unsuitable for much eighteenth century repertoire’.²⁹ ‘Precision of pitch’ was compromised by the viol’s lack of flexibility: once the fret was set so was the pitch, and the player was less able to accommodate the shifting pitch of [50] others than on an instrument of the violin family. Sadie suggests, ‘While the preferences of patrons and the exigencies of specific occasions often determined the instrumentation of an ensemble, the use of Italian instruments to perform increasingly Italianate music was inevitable ... the viol parts became less idiomatic and hence more readily adapted to instruments with smaller ranges and less facility in playing chords’.³⁰ The unsuitability of the viol for the new repertoire is a key to its fall from grace.

In his *Dictionnaire*, the first edition of which appeared in 1701, Sebastien de Brossard defined ‘sonata’ thus:

Sonatas are ordinarily extended pieces, Fantasias, or Preludes, etc., varied by all sorts of emotions and styles, by rare or unusual chords, by simple or double Fugues, etc., etc., all purely according to the fantasy of the Composer, who, being restricted by none but the general rules of Counterpoint, nor by any fixed metre or particular rhythmic pattern,

²⁶ Sadie, *The Bass Viol*, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸ Jackson, ‘Hubert Le Blanc’s *Défense de In viole*’ (1973), 27.

²⁹ V. Walden, *One Hundred Years of Violoncello* (Cambridge, 1998), 3.

³⁰ Sadie, *The Bass Viol*, 20.

devotes his efforts to the inspiration of his talent, changes the rhythm and the scale as he sees fit, etc. One finds [sonatas] in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 parts, but ordinarily they are for Violin alone or for two different Violins with a Basso continuo for the Clavecin, and often a more figured bass for the Viola da gamba, the Bassoon, etc.³¹

Le Blanc provides a partial definition of Italian music through a comparison with the French style. This displays the common French trait of using the standards of French music as a benchmark:

in music, just as in discourse, there is a distinction to be made between poetry and prose... [and there is a] notable difference between harmony and melody. The Italians seek one above all; the French sacrifice everything for the other. The Character of musical poetry is Melody. It is found in all French pieces for the viol and for the harpsichord... The property of musical prose is harmony, without which the Sonata would merely be on a par with the low level of music of a children's choir.³²

Sonatas have been adopted in place of pieces because their style is more humanising:³³

... the Italian style, in which the bow, by down-bows and up-bows, uniform and connected, without their succession being perceptible, produces cascades of notes, multiplied infinitely, which only appear as a continuity, like those formed by the throats of Cossini and Faustina.³⁴

James Anthony provides a list of the words used to describe music by contemporaries:³⁵

French: beauté, calme, charme, delicate, douceur, élégant, grâce, intelligent, naturel, netteté, noble, régularité, (la belle) simplicité, tendresse, touchant

Italian: (a selection) bizarre, brillant, chargé, défiguré, diversité, extravagance, licence, rage, variété, violence, vivacité

[51] The main distinctions between French and Italian music were of elegance and brilliance, of melody and harmony. The increasing harmonic vocabulary of the Italians contrasted with the comparatively more limited range of the more melodically inclined French.

The sonata at this time was an evolving form, readily malleable to suit a composer's every need, with none of the rigidity of the native French *pieces*. Maybe this explains the appeal of the form to French composers and the increased public appetite for such works. According to the preface of Couperin's *Les goûts réunis* (1724), the first sonatas appeared in France in about the last decade of the seventeenth century, although a sonata attributed to Charpentier has been dated to the latter half of the 1680s.³⁶ From then on, the number of native French sonatas increased steadily, the

³¹ C. Hogwood, *The Trio Sonata* (London, 1979), 16.

³² Jackson, 'Hubert Le Blanc's *Défense de la viole*' (1973), 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁵ Anthony, *French Baroque Music*, 145.

³⁶ Sadie, *The Bass Viol*, 143.

form being adapted to suit French needs, tastes and existing forms. With some exceptions, however, the instruments that fail to find their place in the pantheon of the solo sonata are the viol and the harpsichord (although the latter retained its place as accompanist). The cello and flute find their place alongside the violin but the viol is left to be content with its *pièces*, a situation that Le Blanc found unsatisfactory. Although an ardent defender of the viol, Le Blanc was also an enthusiastic supporter of the sonata, suggesting that it was only through this form that the true worth of the viol could be displayed: 'Did not the inventor of the sonata fulfil at one stroke all the best in instrumental music?'³⁷

In comparison with contemporary sonatas, *pièces de viole* were much more formal and Le Blanc was perhaps yearning for this formality to be removed. The custom of grouping dance movements into suites had grown with the rise of the viol and became unfashionable at much the same time. This was probably because of the 'greed of the French for foreign novelties above all else'³⁸ into which group neither the viol or *pièces* fell. The sonata and the Italian style provided the French with much more freedom of expression and a new structure, unbound by formal conventions, with which to frame it.

The clearest example of the merging of the French and Italian styles came in the music and writings of François Couperin, whose first attempts at writing Italianate sonatas were put forward to the public under an Italian pseudonym. He explained a number of years later in the preface to *Les Nations*:

Charmed by those [sonatas] of Signor Corelli, whose works I shall love as long as I live, much as I do the French works of Monsieur de Lulli, I attempted to compose one, which I had performed in the hall where I had heard those of Corelli. Knowing the greediness of the French for foreign novelties above all else... I pretended that a relative of mine ... had sent me a sonata by a new Italian composer. I rearranged the letters of my name so that it became an Italian one, which I used instead. The sonata was devoured eagerly, and I felt vindicated by it.³⁹

[52] By using a name like Pernucio or Coperuni (André Tessier's two suggestions for the anagram)⁴⁰ Couperin showed that although Italian sonatas were popular in the early 1690s (the date 1692 being given for a manuscript copy of *La Steinquerque*, named after a battle of the same year) it was unwise for him as a Frenchman to admit to writing them himself. Later in his career, Couperin was explicit in his aims as regards sonatas. No longer was he trying to write sonatas in the Italian style, but setting out to write music in which the French and the Italian were drawn together to make *les goûts réunis*, a fusion of tastes whereby French wit could be drawn together with Italian brilliance to make a new style that was more than the sum of its parts. In this way, the Italian style was absorbed and changed rather than adopted wholesale, perhaps in an

³⁷ Jackson, 'Hubert Le Blancs *Défense de la viole*' (1973), 17.

³⁸ F. Couperin quoted in Anthony, *French Baroque Music*, 379.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁰ D. Tunley, *Couperin* (London, 1982), 18.

attempt to take over a style that was threatening native French traditions. The invaders were defeated by being assimilated into French culture.

One might think that there was no room for the viol in *les goûts réunis*, but of all the French composers who were not themselves viol players, Couperin is the one most associated with the instrument. His writing, though stylish, often lies badly under the hand, a problem avoided by Marais, the master of idiomatic viol-writing. Couperin wrote a number of works specifically for the viol, not least the *Pièces de viole* published only five years before his death in 1733. While the first suite owes little to the Italians, the second, with its slow-fast-slow-fast movement structure, is more reminiscent of the sonata, especially considering the fugal second movement. In *Les goûts réunis* (1724) there are two *concerts* (nos. 12 and 13) specifically written for two viols, but, as they were written for the ageing Louis XIV, it is perhaps unsurprising that the viol should take such a prominent role. In other publications the viol is called upon to add an extra part to a predominating texture: the first *ordre* of *Les Nations* (at the end of *La Française*) and the third *concert* from *Concerts Royaux* (the *Prelude* has a 'Contre partie pour la viole si l'on veut').

The most important quality French music gained from its absorption of Italian style in *les goûts réunis* is freedom. The extended formal ideas meant a composer of instrumental music could write much longer, less rigidly structured pieces that moved away from binary dance forms. Similarly, the extended harmonic models that came with these new forms meant a new sense of drive could be injected into the music, a stronger basis for longer movements. Dance suites retained some importance in the new, popular style: Couperin's *Les Nations* consist of extended sonata movements followed by dance movements, Couperin stating in his preface that the sonatas were now introductions for those suites.

Couperin was a watershed figure. Although he continued to favour the viol more than other composers, his progressive style pushed the instrument further from the vanguard of musical taste. Far from including the viol in the new style, his later publications heighten the sense that the viol was no longer as necessary [53] to French music as it once had been.

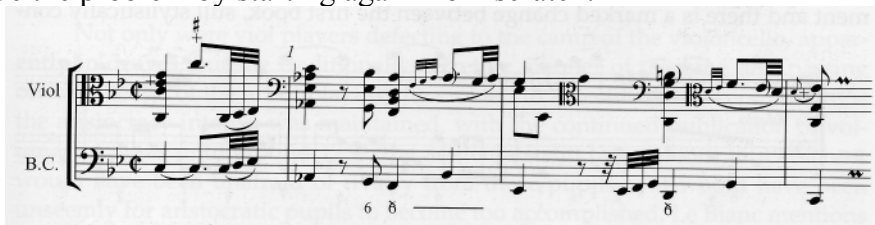
Jean-Baptiste Forqueray's publication of music supposedly by his father, Antoine, shows a different approach to the *pièce*. The writing is technically far removed from the *pièces* of Marais, using all the frets on all seven strings most of the time. One can see aspects of Italian influence in the sophisticated harmonic writing and, more importantly, a shift of emphasis in the nature of its virtuosity. As shown above, French music prized elegance as a chief virtue whilst Italian music favoured extrovert brilliance. The virtuosity of French viol music is very restrained compared to the Italian violin school. Consequently, when that Italianate nature is grafted onto a French viol, tension and physical difficulty result. Anyone attempting the Forqueray *pièces* for the first time will find the natural technique of Marais almost totally absent: instead, the left hand has to work much harder, for example to achieve clean stopping on the high frets on the bottom string, necessitated by the chordal configurations that often

appear (ex.1). That no other composer chose to follow Forqueray's lead is perhaps indicative of a creative cul-de-sac.



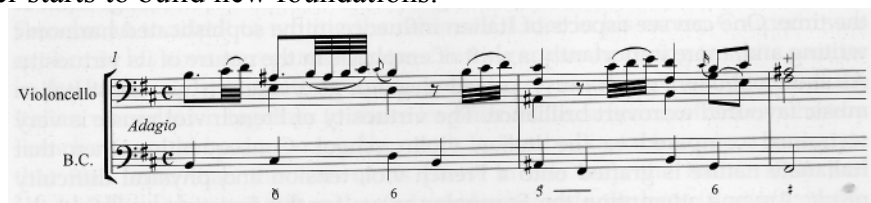
Example 1. Antoine Forqueray, *La Rameau*, bars 14-16.

As the viol slowly lost its popularity it became common for French viol players to travel to Italy to learn the new violoncello. One such example is Jean Barrière (1707-1747), whose cello sonatas are said to be the first idiomatic works for the instrument by a Frenchman.⁴¹ Whereas Forqueray tried in his Italian influenced *pieces* to arrest the viol's decline by bending its forms to include Italian flair, Barrière's work seems to solve the problem by starting again from scratch.



Example 2. Forqueray: *La Rameau*, bars 1-3

La Rameau from Forqueray's fifth suite and a movement each from Barrière's Books I and II show how the former ends a tradition and the latter starts to build new foundations.



Example 3. Jean Barrière: *Adagio* from Book I, Sonata I, bars 1-3.

Here one can see similar grand French openings, although there is already a greater leaning towards a process of modulation in the Barrière. Further on in both these movements, typical French viol figurations are used:



Example 4. Forqueray: *La Rameau*, bar 18.

⁴¹ Walden, *One Hundred Years of Violoncello*, 13.



Example 5. Barrière: *Adagio* from Book I, Sonata I, bars 6-7.

These both exhibit the attachment to the bass line that characterises so much French viol music. However, Barrière was writing for the newer instrument and there is a marked change between the first book, still stylistically connected to



Example 6. Barrière, *Adagio* from Book II, Sonata I, bars 1-3.

[55] the viol school and not fully idiomatic as either viol or cello writing, and the later works from Book II onwards where Barrière makes use of the cello's own vocabulary.

Immediately one can see the difference, this opening resembling an Italian violin sonata. Where there was once detailed ornamental writing, here there is space for the performer to add his own, and with it the greater sense of freedom so typical of Italian music. This was the new direction the viol needed to follow to survive, but the instrument was so deeply associated with the piece that attempts to modernise from within the tradition failed.

Forqueray's *avertissement* promises further volumes if the public receives it favourably.⁴² The absence of any other compositions indicates that there was no such favourable reception. The market at which it was aimed, the private aristocrats (the *avertissement* states that it is intended for the enjoyment of three persons, two viols and a harpsichord), did not respond. Perhaps it was simply too difficult. However it may be, Le Blanc points to Forqueray (senior) as being an influence in a different manner. Having conquered the sonata, Le Blanc writes,

Forqueray's prodigious conquest ... resulted in the inclusion of the viol in the works of other composers, restoring it as a participant in the newly created works being written every day.⁴³

This supports Sadie's statement:

⁴² A. Forqueray, *Pièces de Viole*, *avertissement*.

⁴³ Jackson, 'Hubert Le Blanc's *Défense de la Viole*' (1973), 23.

That the viol was dissociated from the continuo as a recitante instrument in certain movements of trios ... reflects the esteem in which certain players—principally Marais, Forqueray and Alarius—were held by their violin- and keyboard-playing colleagues.⁴⁴

In time, certainly by the death of Antoine Forqueray, there were very few widely-known viol players left, something that

reflects the declining status of viol playing in the course of the eighteenth century. Although its two greatest exponents' sons, Roland Marais and Jean-Baptiste Forqueray, continued to play the viol in Paris ... they could neither inspire nor compose music which was to assure the instrument a place in the vanguard of French musical taste.⁴⁵

Not only were viol players defecting to the camp of the violoncello, apparently in droves, but the traditionally secretive manner of teaching and passing on knowledge of the art of playing the viol led to a decline in players. Amongst the aristocracy interest was maintained, with the continued publication of volumes of pieces until around 1750: the aristocrats still took lessons, but teachers would have been unafraid of rivalry from these pupils as it would have been unseemly for aristocratic pupils to become too accomplished. Le Blanc mentions the unwillingness of teachers to impart information:

[56] These Masters foment the total renunciation of our proper intelligence and the blind obedience to theirs, since they cause the Viol to be like an inheritance descended in their family, exclusive of all the others who only have that knowledge which they have condescended to let fall to them.⁴⁶

The importance of the individual player had an effect on decisions of instrumentation made by composers. Most works that have obbligato viol parts were written by non-players. Julie-Anne Sadie suggests that this was not only because the viol players were held in high regard but also because 'by associating the viol in characteristic roles with Italianate genres, composers were able to hasten the assimilation of the sonata and the cantata into the mainstream of French music'.⁴⁷ However, composers wrote for the viol as a part of a greater whole rather than as a solo instrument. The viol's versatility as both a bass and alto instrument ensured its continued association with the continuo, but even when the viol had a melodic role it was always combined with providing the bass.

Works such as Rameau's *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* (1741), a continuation of the tradition of accompanied keyboard works, show the viol at its most versatile, moving from the lowest register to the highest, at times within the same bar, its part an equal to that of the violin and to the clavecin as far as it could be in what was essentially a florid accompaniment. Here one can see the viol's dual role as bass and melodist, although this case is unusual as the clavecin could itself provide

⁴⁴ Sadie, *The Bass Viol*, 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁶ Jackson, 'Hubert Le Blanc's *Défense de la Viole*' (1974), 36.

⁴⁷ Sadie, *The Bass Viol*, 69.

a suitable bass line. Also, one must remember the alternative instrumentation for the second part: a second violin part was engraved in full before the start of the main score. Did Rameau sense too small a market had he left it simply as a viol part? He seems to have wanted a viable alternative and the cello (nowadays the next obvious instrument to choose) was not developed enough in terms of technique to cope with what on the viol is already a highly virtuosic part.

Other instances that show the dual capacity of the viol to play both bass and melody can be found in cantatas, an Italian form that was far more successful initially than the sonata. The viol was first used in vocal chamber music as a member of the continuo of royal chapel orchestras. The earliest published examples of the use of the viol as a semi-independent instrument appeared in 1708 in cantatas by Bourgeois and Stuck. In Stuck's *Diane* (1714) the viol is used in one of the airs to flesh out and enrich the voice and bass texture with divisions on the bass line; where there was no separate part the viol was to join the continuo. In some cases, the viol played both a bass and melodic role simultaneously. In the second air of *Le Jugement de Paris* by Nicolas Renier the voice is accompanied by a '*viole seule*', the previous air having been accompanied by viol and continuo. In the first half the viol follows the contours of the voice while in the second half it has a more typical bass line, although in a very much higher register.⁴⁸ One has [57] to remember that 'frequently, the instances of divided bass are brief and sporadic, momentarily enriching the texture of only one movement in one or two sonatas or suites in a collection of 12, or in an air of a cantata'.⁴⁹ The viol had proved itself as a dual melodic and bass instrument but had not established a place for such a role as a standard part of a form-it was used more for textural variety than as a matter of course.

An instrument that played *pièces* rather than solo sonatas would not have been considered desirable or necessary and therefore, as it was inextricably linked to the *pièce* genre, the viol slowly lost an important solo role. This meant that it had to compete solely for accompaniment and in this area it was already fighting a losing battle. The viol encompassed a wide range, but the Italian style, and subsequently *les goûts réunis*, had moved away from fully scored textures, away from alto and tenor parts, to a dessus and bass format. This was an area that provoked comment by Frenchmen, Le Cerf complaining in a discussion of the trio sonata that

the first trebles of the Italians squeak because they are too high. Their second trebles have the fault of being too close to the first, and too far from the bass... I find it advantageous and profitable to make the second treble into a tenor, as we do ... because the tenor occupies the distance between the bass and the treble and thus binds the chords of the trio ...

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 63 and 59.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

It is not our fault that the second parts of our trios are only tenors. On the contrary, I maintain that the body of the trio is better off for it.⁵⁰

This points back to a preference for the orchestral texture of Lully that involved a violin part, a bass and three violas. The Italophile Ragueneau gives an altogether different opinion as he considered the trio sonata:

we there shall find the mighty Advantages the Italians have over the French ... Among us the first upper Part is generally beautiful enough; but then the second usually descends too low to deserve our Attention. In Italy the upper Parts are generally three or four Notes higher than in France; so that their Seconds are high enough to have as much Beauty as the very First with us.⁵¹

This clear delineation of registers was one into which the viol would never happily fit, one of its notable features being its roving nature. The continued use of the viol in its higher registers might have provided it with a new role, but there was no place or need for a middle-range instrument in the Italianate sonata repertoire, and in the orchestral environment there already existed a suitable exponent in the form of the viola.

Corrette's *Méthode théorique and pratique pour apprendre en peu de temps le violoncelle dans sa perfection* of 1741 is written, in part, for those who 'know how to play the Viol and who wish to learn the Violoncello ... as the majority of those who play the Viol presently have a taste for playing the Violoncello'.⁵² Two years [58] earlier the first sonatas for the violoncello were played with great success at the *Concert Spirituel*. Corrette's treatise, this first performance and the publication of the solo sonatas of Jean-Baptiste Barrière did, in the words of James Anthony, 'more than anything else to popularise the cello in France and doom the bass viol as a solo instrument'.⁵³

As technique for the violoncello was refined, so the instrument gained for itself an identity that pulled it from the shadows. In France, at least, it gave rise to an entirely new tradition of music: Elizabeth Cowling found that in response to the question 'Were the early violoncello sonatas transcriptions of sonatas originally written for the bass viola da gamba?' the answer is 'no'.⁵⁴ The acoustic design of the violoncello gave it an instant advantage in volume over the viol, and as the instrument evolved into something smaller and more versatile, it gained on the viol's dexterity. A violoncellist had to have two instruments, but so did the

⁵⁰ Le Cerf, 'Second Dialogue', published in J. Bonnet, *Histoire de la musique* (Amsterdam, 1725), 11, 65; quoted in Hogwood, *The Trio Sonata*, 102.

⁵¹ F. Ragueneau, *Parallèle des Italiens et des Français en ce qui regarde la musique et les operas* (Paris, 1702); anon. English translation attr. J. E. Galliard (1709) in Strunk, *Source Readings* 473-8, at pp. 479-80 (1965), III, 113-28, at pp. 119-20.

⁵² Anthony, *French Baroque Music*, 398.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ E. Cowling, 'Were the Early Violoncello Sonatas Transcriptions of Sonatas Originally Written for the Bass Viola da Gamba?', *JVdGSA* 5 (1968), 56.

violinist, so there was no advantage lost there: J.-B. Forqueray mentions in his letter to Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia that he had two viols 'which my father played for twenty-five years of his life. One for solo work, the other for accompaniment'.⁵⁵ 15 Sonatas for bass instruments became common, an example being *Les délices de solitude* by Corrette, written for violoncello, viol or bassoon, but in general these sonatas have nothing in them that sets them apart as being better suited to the viol.

Walden writes that 'musicians ... gradually replaced the use of the viola da gamba with that of the violoncello, acceptance of the latter by the Parisians being the death knell for the viol family'. This is possible, but seems unlikely as the acceptance of the violoncello appears to be merely symptomatic of a wider stylistic problem. The violin, previously thought of as an instrument fit for dancing, has more blame in the matter. Le Cerf writes, '[the violin] is not noble in France ... one sees few gentlemen of means who play it and many lowly Musicians who make their living by it'.⁵⁶ By the middle of the century, more nobles were playing this instrument for their amusement by means of the new sonatas.

These nobles, however, were male: it was only just acceptable for men to play the violin but certainly not for women. This prohibition led many gentlewomen to the pardessus, an upward evolution of the treble viol popular from around 1730. Its five-string version was tuned in fifths and fourths, the bottom string replicating the G, D, A of the violin, and gave women a socially sanctioned means of access to the new repertoire without the problems of learning an on-the-shoulder playing technique. This extension of the viol family prolonged its life until around 1760, when etiquette started to relax and the pardessus went into decline.⁵⁷ The pardessus was mostly taken up instead of, rather than as well as, the bass viol, and the response of composers to the new trend was two-fold: some wrote entirely new music, while others simply arranged earlier viol works. [59] Louis de Caix d'Hervelois published two books for the pardessus in the 1750s, most of which were arrangements of earlier publications for the bass viol. The music is simplified for the smaller instrument, with the notation made clearer and much of the chordal writing removed.⁵⁸ The last works to be published for the pardessus, by Nicolas Lendormy, appeared c1780, reflecting a belated interest in the instrument among the aristocracy.⁵⁹

Growing interest in other instruments ultimately lessened the appeal of the viol within aristocratic circles, the most important group for its survival. As people found new alternatives that gave them access to the expanding

⁵⁵ J. Rutledge, 'A Letter of J.-B.-A. Forqueray, Translated and with Commentary', *JVdGSA* 13 (1976), 12.

⁵⁶ Le Cerf quoted in Anthony, *French Baroque Music*, 349.

⁵⁷ T. Chancey, 'Gender, Class and Eighteenth-Century French Music: Barthélemy de Caix's Six Sonatas for Two Unaccompanied Pardessus de Viole', *JVdGSA* 33 (1996), 47-78, at p. 51.

⁵⁸ R. Green, 'The *Pardessus de Viole* and its Literature', *EM* 10 (1982), 300-7 at pp. 302-3.

⁵⁹ A. Rose, 'The Pardessus de Viole: Notes for a Master's Thesis', *Chelys* 24 (1995), 34-46, at p. 43.

Italianate repertoire so the viol's popularity dwindled, due to its associations with the old styles.

I have attempted to show a chain of interlinked reasons for the viol's decline in popularity, beginning with the death of Louis XIV when the viol lost a powerful supporter. The move of the centre of cultural society from the court in the second decade of the century, and the development of public concerts, increased the influence of fashionable taste; the viol, moreover, did not have the capacity to produce the sound necessary for performance in front of an animated audience. The gradual adoption of a more Italianate style eventually left the viol without a secure role in French music. The start of a more rapid stage of decline comes somewhere around the publication of the *Pièces de viole* by Antoine Forqueray, the fact that another volume of *Pièces* did not appear (as had been offered) suggesting a turning point in the fortunes of the instrument. By the Revolution there was little activity as regards the viol in public circles, although this does not rule out private activities continuing as happened in England; continued playing of the viol in private, however, could not compete with the everchanging nature of public concerts and could not exert as much influence one way or the other.

Thus neither the new concert-led environment nor the Italian style supported the venerable viol. Although the instrument cannot be said to have totally died out in the eighteenth century, the loss of its place in society and the lack of new repertoire had the same effect. The viol became a ghost to haunt the chateaux of stubborn viol partisans.