

Louis Couperin: Pièces de Clavecin in F Major (1660)

Louis Couperin was born in Chaumes-en-Brie, France, in 1626, and moved to Paris in 1650. He was regarded as one of the finest musicians of his time, and his compositions, though little known today, provide us with evidence of the brilliance of the French harpsichord school. He is the uncle of François “le Grand” Couperin, and while many admit that he might not have the intimacy or breadth of fancy of his more famous nephew, his works are not lacking in humor, inventiveness, and sensuality.

None of Couperin's music was published during his lifetime, but manuscript copies of some 200 pieces survive, some of them only rediscovered in the mid-20th century. Dance movements comprise around two thirds of Louis Couperin's harpsichord works, as is the case with the Pièces de Clavecin in F Major. Here we have, in addition to the usual Allemande and Courante, a lively Branle de Basque - a type of French dance popular from the early 16th century to the present, danced by couples in either a line or a circle. Also included is the lovely and evocative “Le Tombeau de Mr. de Blancrocher.” This elegiac homage to the celebrated lutenist is notable for its programmatic references to the tragic accident that befell Blancrocher, who died in 1652 after falling down a flight of stairs.

Notes by Steve Siegel