

## Music for the “Sun” King

French Music under  
Louis XIV



Versailles Palace with Fountains



## Music at the Service of Absolutism

- Music in France heavily centralized: controlled by Monarch, centred in Paris and environs
- Music and dance reinforce socio-political structures
  - musical organizations controlled by monarchy (monopolies granted to individuals; no competition)
  - choreography of dance part of social “choreography”

## Musical Organizations

### *Musique de la grande Écurie:*

- civic brass and drum corps; ceremonial music

### *Musique de la Chambre:*

- domestic entertainment for monarchy; includes “24 Violons du Roi”, harpsichord players

### *Chapelle Royale:*

- Sacred music for royal chapel; singers and instrumentalists

### *Académie Royale de Musique:*

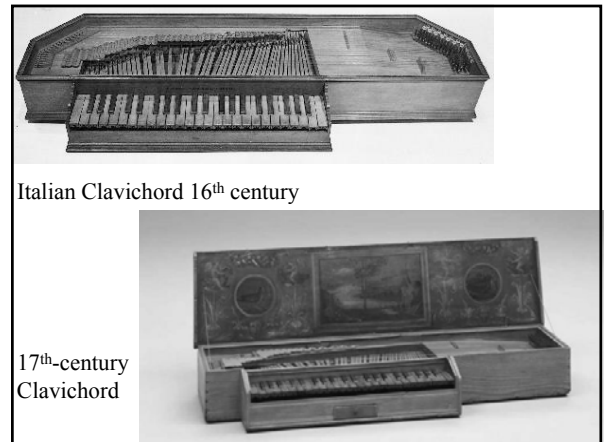
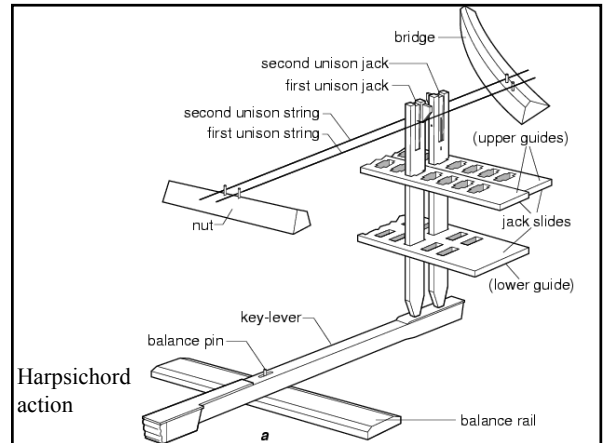
- only organization permitted to stage musical-dramatic works
- worked to co-ordinate imagery, mythology, language of the monarchy

## French *clavecin* music

- clavecin = harpsichord
- solo music: domestic entertainment
  - never in large concert setting
  - well-trained amateurs
  - girls—music was desirable ability; improve marriage prospects
  - royal court performances
- much emphasis on ornaments

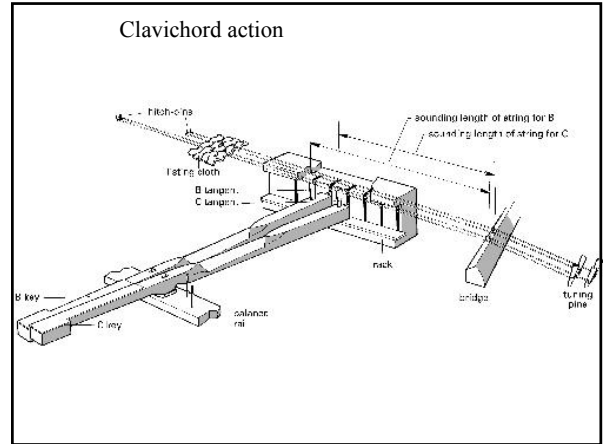
## Types of Instruments

- Plucked strings:
  - harpsichord
  - virginal
- Hammered strings:
  - clavichord
  - fortepiano (pianoforte)
- Wind:
  - organ






Clavichord—18<sup>th</sup> century




## Louis Couperin (c. 1626–1661)

- Court musician and composer
- Brought to Paris by courtier impressed with his compositions
- *Tombeau*: genre in memory of deceased colleague usually has character of a lament
- *Tombeau de M. de Blancrocher* in memory of lute player Charles Fleury (Blancrocher)
  - *style brisé*: broken style; lute/harpsichord technique to space notes of a chord temporally (type of arpeggiation)



## Elizabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729)



- child prodigy; sang/played for King Louis XIV
- composed in most major genres: first French woman to compose an opera
- *Pièces de clavessin* (pub. 1687)
  - Contains Suites for solo harpsichord

## Suite

- instrumental composition consists of several movements:
  - may or may not begin with a Prelude
  - series of stylized dances—not actually meant to be danced

Allemande Courante Sarabande Gigue


“unmeasured” Prelude: free, without regular rhythm; sounds improvised

See p. 224 for sample notation


## Unmeasured Prelude

**Ex. 2**

(a) Louis Couperin: opening of Prelude no. 13



(b) Louis Couperin: *Tombeau de Mr Blancrocher*



## Allemande

Ex.3 François de Chancy: *Allemande pour luth* from Meissen: *Harmonie universelle*, ii (1637), 88



Duple meter, harmonic motion dictates form; may have unusual phrase-lengths; tends to be exploratory

## Courante

Ex.7 R. Ballard: *Premier livre d'intabulations pour la luth* (1611)



Rustic dance in triple meter; became most important courtly dance under Louis XIV (he danced opening Courante at court balls); often includes hemiola

## Sarabande

Ex.7 *Sarabanda* opening section, *F-Pn* Vm<sup>7</sup> 741



Stately Spanish dance in triple meter, typically with anacrusis (upbeat)

## Gigue

Ex.5  
(a) J. S. Bach: *Gigue*, from *Partita* for keyboard in B minor



Cheerful, lively dance in triple meter (often compound meter); may be contrapuntal

## François Couperin (1668-1733)

- Nephew of Louis
- organist; later finest French harpsichordist of his time
- Appointed King's harpsichordist and received court privileges to publish music
- Suites include "character pieces" in addition to dances



F. Couperin's explanation of *agréments* (embellishments)