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SUBLIME ET MUSIQUE RELIGIEUSE DE LALANDE À HAYDN
HÔTEL FUMÉ, UNIVERSITÉ DE POITIERS, 8–10 NOVEMBER 2012

The sublime was a central category of eighteenth-century poetics and aesthetics, and it has gained favour again in modern and postmodern discussions of the arts. Yet the reasons for its fashionability then and now are different. Many recent discussions of the sublime take their cue from Jean-François Lyotard, who assigned the sublime a central role in the postmodern resistance to the capitalist rationalization of society and its beautiful, easily commodifiable cultural artefacts. Shock and the recurrent reminder of the limits to human knowledge are essential features of recent discussions of sublimity. By contrast, many eighteenth-century intellectuals and artists had more confidence in their ability to know what caused their transport, and their thoughts invariably circled around religion.

Most historians of eighteenth-century culture are circumspect enough not to visit postmodern ideals of the sublime on the eighteenth century. However, the scholarly emphasis on the experience of shock over its possible causes is surely due in part to the particular secular function that the sublime plays in contemporary culture. This emphasis has led to a general tendency to focus on secular genres, in particular the symphony, to emphasize the secular communal and national functions of religious genres, such as the oratorio, and to favour British (Burkean) and German (Kantian) definitions of sublimity, which emphasize the role played by formal means and the process of reception in the evocation of sublimity, rather than the message. Despite the work of such scholars as Michela Garda, Laurenz Lütteken and James Webster, the role of the category of the sublime in the religious music and traditions of the eighteenth century remains a desideratum of research.

In their conference organized under the aegis of the ANR Project *Muséfrem*, Thierry Favier (Université de Poitiers) and Sophie Hache (Université Lille III) aimed to redress this situation. Invitees to the conference included scholars from musicology, the history of literature and the history of art, which resulted in an exemplary plurality of methodology and subject matter. This disciplinary plurality did mean that certain seemingly central musical figures (such as Lalande) were mentioned only in passing or not at all. But the breadth of context more than compensated for fullness of coverage.

A central issue that faced all participants was how to define the sublime, a term inherently resistant to neat delimitation. The most sceptical approach was taken by Hélène Michon (Université François Rabelais de Tours), who argued that the Augustinian tradition of interiority – so important to various mystical traditions, Jansenism and certain traditions of Protestantism – has been wrongly associated with the sublime. The mystical encounter with the divine lacked the altitudinal structure characteristic of the sublime. Otherwise, conference participants at times delineated sublimity through a discussion of particular critical and theoretical traditions, at times through a discussion of particular artistic practices informed by vocabulary associated with sublimity, though all productively mixed discussions of theory and practice.

Those scholars who focused on critical traditions situated their subjects in particular contexts, sometimes national, sometimes art historical or literary. At times, the scholars spoke less about music *per se* than about contemporaneous critical, literary and art-historical traditions. A good example of both a national contextualization and an illumination of a literary practice was provided by Sophie Hache, who examined the various ways that French writers and critics interpreted the rhetorical figure of *hypotyposis*, the vivid description of events. She noted the tendency of writers to use this figure to exploit the sonic qualities of words and to explore word arrangement. She asked: were these practices of vivid writing paralleled in any way by the compositional practices associated with the grand motet?

The English critical tradition was covered by Pierre Dubois (Université François Rabelais de Tours) and Sabine Volk-Birke (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenburg). Dubois addressed the use of the critical category of the sublime as a prescriptive tool in discussions of church music in England over the course of the eighteenth century. Volk-Birke discussed ‘Prayer in Handel’s Libretti’ by investigating two roots of



Handel's texts for the Chandos Anthems. While Handel drew upon the Book of Common Prayer for the anthems, the poetry selected and the transformations made to it show the influence of John Dennis's concept of sublime religious poetry.

While much recent scholarship has focused on German ideals of sublimity, the participants in this conference tended to focus on France, though Germany was not neglected either. Agathe Sueur (Université Paris Sorbonne–Paris IV) argued that Gottsched and subsequently Scheibe derived their rhetorical approach to the sublime from Werenfels's *De Meteoris orationis* (1694). Volker Kapp emphasized the importance Kant and Schiller assigned to ethics in their theories of the sublime, an importance he felt was neglected in German-language musicological scholarship. Therese Bruggisser-Lanker (Universität Zürich) examined Martin Gerbert's late text *De sublimi*. Gerbert's theology, strongly influenced by Augustinian principles, allowed him to see ancient church music as a sublimely simple means of devotion.

Several of the scholars looked beyond critical texts and traditions to examine church practices. Servane L'Hopital (Université Lumière–Lyon 2) examined discussions of the mass that emanated from the Council of Trent. While Catholic theologians were aware that ritual elicited emphatic religious experiences from congregations, they were wary of the nature of these rituals. Was it a human technology or was it an authentic medium of the divine? Delphine Bastet (Université de Provence) examined the tradition by which a painting (a 'may') was offered yearly to the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. She noted a shift in style from expressive grandeur to pastoral simplicity over the course of the seventeenth century.

Bastet was only one of several scholars who focused on visual expressions or representations of sublimity. Marianne Cojannot-Le Blanc (Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense) distinguished between high expressivity and the sublime by examining Charles Le Brun's commentaries on his own paintings, as well as the intellectual traditions of devout circles in seventeenth-century France. She provided an exceptionally rich visual and theoretical documentation of an artist's confrontation with principles of sublimity before they were widely theorized. Mathieu Lours (Université de Cergy-Pontoise) noted the tendency of church architects to plan ever more monumental churches in the eighteenth century in order to measure up to the sublimities of religion. The approach lent itself to a subsequent secularization of religious practice in the use of monumental churches for secular practices after the French Revolution.

Among those who examined musical practices, several addressed the special function that music was assigned amongst writers and theorists of texts. Claire Fourquet-Gracieux (Université Paris Sorbonne–Paris IV) noted that the translation of psalms into the vernacular was often perceived to be a step away from the sacrality of the Latin language. Yet these psalms were occasionally set to secular melodies through a parody technique. While the French language threatened to degrade the sacrality of the poems, the sublimity of music, even when secular, provided the saving grace. In my own paper (Keith Chapin, Cardiff University) I noted a similar appeal to music in Christian Fürchtegott Gellert's recommendation of simple chorale melodies for the performance of his 'songs for the heart'. Gellert believed that the restrained melodies overcame certain problems of poetic language, in essence appealing to a neoclassical principle of restraint, though the composers who set his popular poetry did not necessarily work with the same ideal of sublimity.

Another issue that surfaced frequently in the discussion of musical traditions was what musical techniques were apposite to transport. One can group these techniques principally according to the parameters of formal organization, texture and harmony. Thierry Favier noted that composers of grand motets often experimented with texture and form as they sought to evoke the terrific, terrifying divine omnipotence. Pierre Saby (Université Lumière–Lyon 2) noted the use of an instrumental cadenza in Mozart's C minor Mass to evoke a moment of stasis outside of normal musical (and ritual) time. Herbert Seifert (Universität Wien) addressed 'The Sublime in the "Stabat mater" Compositions by Antonio Vivaldi, Antonio Maria Bononcini and Giovanni Battista Pergolesi', noting the special effects created by homophonic choral passages, fugal movements in alla breve and unusual leaps such as the minor ninth.

However, manifestations of sublimity often seemed to depend as much on the religious subject matter as on particular compositional techniques. This could be seen in the presentation by Robert Rawson (Canterbury



Christ Church University) on 'The Changing Role(s) of Sublime and Rural Images in Sacred Music in the Czech Lands 1640–1800'. The sublimity of a sacred subject like the Nativity was such that it could receive some surprisingly non-sublime settings. In the Benedictus of Georg Zrunek's Christmas Mass, for example, the chorus imitates the bleating of sheep. Similarly, Jean-Philippe Gosselin (Université de Toulouse II–Le Mirail) noted a variety of compositional responses to the sacred history of Tobias, from the stupefyingly monumental to the suavely fluid.

Pedagogy and the relationship of norm and licence was another issue of central importance, as shown by the nicely complementary papers of Théodora Psychoyou (Université Paris Sorbonne–Paris IV) and Don Fader (University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa), who discussed the sublime associations of canonic writing and harmonic ambiguity respectively. The vocabulary of the sublime was often used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to discuss departures from compositional norms of part-writing and chord connection. Yet while this vocabulary fitted well with the comparatively extravagant (Italian) effects that French composers sought, it created problems for pedagogy. How was one to teach procedures that were ostensibly the result of sublime negligence of rules?

The sixteenth-century Hôtel Fumé in the city centre of Poitiers, ancient capital of the Dukes of Aquitaine, provided a beautiful setting for the conference. Aside from fine meals together, participants also profited from an expert tour of the city's medieval and gothic churches by Claude Andrault (Université de Poitiers) and a concert by Le Jeune Orchestre Atlantique and Le Jeune Choeur de Paris under the direction of Christophe Coin, which included a rare performance of Antonio Salieri's *Le jugement dernier* (1788). The organizers were ably assisted by Louis Delpech (Université de Poitiers). The conference was in all respects highly successful, and the fruits of the discussion will be made available in a forthcoming book to be published by Éditions Garnier.

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TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON MUSIC IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

FOUNDLING MUSEUM, LONDON, 30 NOVEMBER 2012

A number of common strands ran through this year's conference on music in eighteenth-century Britain: the role and participation of women in music, music at Covent Garden Theatre, and one of the most unusual of instruments – the piano-forte guitar. Proceedings started with a paper by Jenny Nex (Royal College of Music) concerning the business of making English guitars in late eighteenth-century London, and in particular the work of Charles Pinto. Pinto was one of a number of manufacturers working in London at this period; the activities of this small- to medium-sized type of business are often neglected. An inventory made of Pinto's premises in Johnsons Court after his death in 1792 casts extensive light on the sort and scope of the activities he undertook, and presents a fascinating picture of a house with musical instruments and the tools of the trade scattered in every room. His activities were compared, using further archival material, to those of other manufacturers active in London at the time in order to elucidate their different manners of working, indicating that other businesses may have had small workshops attached or specific portions of the house set aside for manufacture.

One of the instruments Pinto produced was the distinctly odd-looking piano-forte guitar, a type of English instrument in which a mechanism including keys (sometimes placed in a box on top, sometimes integrated into the body of the guitar itself) allowed hammers to strike the strings through the central rose.