CHAPTER I

Introduction

French organ music in the reign of Louis XIV (1643–1715) is one of the most elusive repertories to perform with authority. What is necessary comprises not only the re-creation of authentic sounds (the first step), but also an understanding of compositional styles and a knowledge of performance practices, with all the subtleties of execution that those entail. All three are, of course, intimately related. Matters such as tempi, rhythm, ornaments, phrasing, articulation, fingering, touch, pitch and temperament, and in some cases the very reliability of the original publications on which modern editions are based, have posed more questions than answers, making performances more like leaps of faith. Furthermore, the professional lives of French organists, the liturgical practices in which they took part, their social positions, as well as the religious, social and cultural mores of the clergy and the congregations they played to, are topics that are now utterly remote from our own experience. And yet the music, the instruments and the cultural context have an allure and a character that inspires fascination and curiosity. That this music had a similar allure for a very few but perceptive composers in other countries can be estimated from the copies of Nicolas de Grigny's *Premier livre d'orgue* (1699) made by J. G. Walther and J. S. Bach (the latter most likely copied between 1709 and 1712).[1] This not only reflected a German interest in French music,[2] but was also symptomatic of a more general fascination with French culture in Europe.

Extant organists' contracts relating to Louis Couperin (1626–1661) at St Gervais in 1653 and Nicolas-Antoine Lebègue (1631–1702) at St Merry (St Médéric) in 1676 state that they were responsible for about 400 services per year, with some major feast days requiring the organ at five or even six services (Easter Day).[3] On such days, with each service having its own

[1] H. Joseph Butler, 'The *Premier livre d'orgue* of Nicolas de Grigny and the revisions by J. S. Bach and J. G. Walther: an overview and appraisal', *The Organ Yearbook* **33** (2004), 73.

[2] See David Ponsford, 'J. S. Bach and the nature of French "influence"', *The Organ Yearbook* **29** (2000), 59–74.

[3] Louis Couperin's contract can be seen in Paul Brunold, *Le grand orgue de Saint-Gervais à Paris* (Paris: L'Oiseau-Lyre, 1934), 88–90. Lebègue's obligations and contract are reproduced in Norbert Dufourcq, *Nicolas Lebègue* (Paris: Picard, 1954), 149–50, 171–2; also in the preface to the facsimile edition of Nicolas-Antoine Lebègue, *Troisième livre d'orgue* (Courlay: Fuzeau, 1998), 7–13.

Ill. 1. St Etienne-du-Mont, Paris. Organ originally by Pierre Pescheur (1631).

liturgy, organists could be required to play more than 100 versets. Therefore improvisation was the norm, which is the most likely reason why Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764), who held various posts as organist from 1702 to 1722 or early 1723, notably at Clermont Cathedral, left behind no organ music whatsoever. Although publications, then, counted for only a small fraction of what must have been an enormous improvised repertory, they were nevertheless special presentations that served a variety

of purposes: to mark the end of apprenticeship and a certificate of professional competence (François Couperin); an encyclopaedic collection of appropriate ways of playing the organ at services (Lebègue, André Raison); a collection of pieces summing up a career (Nicolas Gigault, Louis Marchand); and no doubt as an aid to professional advancement as well. These publications would also have served as pedagogical models for improvisation, and because of their circulation they also provided opportunities for composers to extend the musical scope of the genres. These lavish publications not only set standards for both composition and engraving, but were also part of a larger agenda to preserve the *gloire* of both Louis XIV and France for posterity, as well as seeking to establish political and cultural hegemony in Europe.

The methodology I have adopted has been to examine the repertory by genre, a method first used for studies of this repertory by Gunther Morche,[4] and later by Elisabeth Gallat-Morin, inspired by the teaching and thinking of Kenneth Gilbert, in her analysis of the *Livre d'orgue de Montréal*.[5] In this, the largest extant manuscript collection of French Baroque organ music, Lebègue's authorship can be proved in fourteen of the 398 pieces, although many more can be linked to him.

The present study began as a PhD dissertation on one aspect of performance practice, *notes inégales*.[6] This was not just another study of the sources of *inégalité* (there have been sufficient already), but an investigation into whether the organ genres, and particularly their compositional styles, had an influence on the interpretation of rhythm, bearing in mind that authorial sources were only general principles directed towards children and amateurs (as Etienne Loulié stated in his preface to *Eléments ou principes de musique*, 1696) and hardly prescriptive for professional organist-composers such as François Couperin and de Grigny. During this study, it became obvious that the examination of each genre – particularly the manner in which it was successively developed, modified and subjected to influences such as secular dance and Italian trio sonatas – was the most effective way to study this repertory.

Most previous writings have adopted either one of two approaches: Willi Apel, Norbert Dufourcq, James R. Anthony and others have dealt with the repertory chronologically by composer,[7] and other more focused research

[4] Gunther Morche, *Muster und Nachahmung: eine Untersuchung der klassischen französischen Orgelmusik* (Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1979).

[5] Elisabeth Gallat-Morin, *Le livre d'orgue de Montréal* (Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1988), ch. 6.

[6] David Ponsford, 'Genre and *notes inégales* in the *Livres d'orgue* of François Couperin and Nicolas de Grigny', PhD thesis, Cardiff University (1999).

[7] Willi Apel, *The History of Keyboard Music to 1700*, tr. and rev. Hans Tischler (Bloomington, IN, and London: Indiana University Press, 1972). Norbert Dufourcq, *Le livre de l'orgue français: 1589–1789*, vol. IV: *La musique* (Paris: Picard, 1972). James R. Anthony, *French Baroque Music* (London: Batsford, and New York, NY: Norton, 1974), revised and expanded edition (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997).

projects have studied particular composers and publications in detail.[8] Other studies that have discussed individual genres have concentrated on registration and the genre's association with broad compositional norms.[9] However, these methodologies have unwittingly avoided the central issue, which is the fundamental *raison d'être* of this book, that each genre – the *plein jeu*, *fugue*, *duo*, *trio*, *récit* and *grand jeu* – had its own line of historical development, with successive composers 'developing' the exemplars from previous publications. This development could take either positive or consciously negative forms, but the genres can be seen to be like a series of parallel historiographical spinal columns, with each successive 'vertebra' being modelled on, developing from, or reacting against previous models. Hence in this book, the repertory is divided into discrete chapters on individual genres, each of which is organised chronologically, and the discussion is focused on the *livres d'orgue* published between 1660 and *c.* 1732 (see Table 1.1), as well as manuscript collections such as that by Louis Couperin (which is extremely important) and the *Livre d'orgue de Montréal*. Obviously, with such an enormous quantity of music, a complete study of every piece would obscure the main issues with too much detail, so the assumption has been made that publications were more influential than most manuscripts, and will therefore form the prime focus, although not exclusively so.

The philosophy behind this book is to bring together the disciplines of stylistic analysis and performance practice. Performers need to grasp the stylistic developments of each genre in order to gain some idea of how to play with authority and taste. A simple hypothetical example will clarify the point: if a particular organ piece by François Couperin can be shown to be composed in the style of an Italian *corrente*, then this information is crucial to decisions regarding tempo and *inégalité*. However, a purely analytical study of the forms and notated styles cannot reveal the full picture. In French Baroque music particularly, performance and therefore performance practice issues are an important part of the syntax and identity of the music, and a generic approach to this repertory requires a considerable understanding of performance-related topics. Hence the justification for including 'technical' discussions of *notes inégales*, ornaments and fingering, before the essential chapters on the organ genres themselves. Furthermore, since the influence of Italian music was so significant for French organ music, especially so as composers such as François Couperin and others positively differentiated between Italian and French styles of performance, an account of Italian musical influence in late seventeenth-century Paris has been included.

[8] For example, William Pruitt, 'The organ works of Guillaume Gabriel Nivers (1632–1714)', *Recherches sur la musique française classique* **15** (1973), 47–79.

[9] Bruce Gustafson, 'France' in A. Silbiger (ed.), *Keyboard Music before 1700*, second edition (New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2004), 90–146. Edward Higginbottom, 'The French classical organ school' in N. Thistlethwaite and G. Webber (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 176–89.

Table 1.1. *Organ publications, 1660–c. 1732*

Date	Composer	Title
1660	F. Roberday	*Fugues et caprices*
1665	G.-G. Nivers	*Livre d'orgue contenant cent pièces de tous les tons*
1667	G.-G. Nivers	*2. livre d'orgue contenant la messe et les hymnes*
1675	G.-G. Nivers	*3. livre d'orgue des huits tons de l'église*
1676	N. Lebègue	*Les pièces d'orgue*
*c.*1678	N. Lebègue	*Second livre d'orgue . . . contenant des pièces . . . et la messe*
1682	N. Gigault	*Livre de musique* (2 vols.)
1685	N. Gigault	*Livre de musique . . . contenant plus de 180 pièces . . . plusieurs messes, quelques hymnes*
*c.*1685	N. Lebègue	*Troisième livre d'orgue . . . contenant des grandes offertoires et des élévations; et tous les noëls les plus connus, des symphonies*
1688	A. Raison	*Livre d'orgue contenant cinq messes*
1689	J. H. d'Anglebert	*Pièces de clavecin . . . quelque fugues pour l'orgue*
1690	J. Boyvin	*Premier livre d'orgue contenant les huit tons*
1690	F. Couperin	*Pièces d'orgue consistantes en deux messes*
1690	G. Jullien	*Premier livre d'orgue*
1695	L. Chaumont	*Pièces d'orgue sur les 8 tons*
1699	N. de Grigny	*Premier livre d'orgue contenant une messe et les hymnes*
1700	J. Boyvin	*Second livre d'orgue contenant les huit tons*
1703	G. Corrette	*Messe du 8^e^ ton pour l'orgue*
1706	J.-A. Guilain	*Pièces d'orgue pour le Magnificat*
1708	P. Du Mage	*1^er^ livre d'orgue contenant une suite du premier ton*
*c.*1710	L.-N. Clérambault	*Premier livre d'orgue contenant deux suites*
1711	C. Piroye	*Pièces choisies . . . tant pour l'orgue et le clavecin*
1714	A. Raison	*Second livre d'orgue*
1714	P. Dandrieu	*Noëls, O Filii, chansons de Saint Jacques*
*c.*1732	L. Marchand	*Pièces choisies pour l'orgue*

No words can adequately substitute for experiencing the actual sounds of historic French organs, their playing characteristics, their pitch and temperament systems and their acoustical as well as liturgical contexts, which are essential for providing relevance and authority to studies both theoretical and practical. Furthermore, a wide knowledge of other contemporaneous repertories will help in locating the organ music within a broad musical context.

A word needs to be said about the traditional title 'French classical' for both the instrument and its repertory, which has been used, hitherto, by most writers. The word 'classical' is associated with the earlier decades of Louis XIV's reign, when the king himself, together with his architects, dramatists, artists, sculptors, musicians and landscape gardeners, was intent on recreating the glories of Rome;[10] hence, by extension, the word

[10] For an overview of the artistic culture of Louis XIV, see Nicolas Milovanovic and Alexandre Maral (eds.), *Louis XIV: l'homme & le roi* (Paris: Editions Skira-Flammarion, 2009).

was used to denote work 'of the first rank or authority'. While this sentiment is not in doubt, the word 'classical' nevertheless also denotes a particular period in musical history, exemplified by the organ pieces of Guillaume Lasceux and Beauvarlet Charpentier (published from 1783 onwards) as well as Michel Corrette's *Pièces pour l'orgue* (1787). Hence the confusion of 'classical' being traditionally applied to the period from Nivers's first *Livre d'orgue* (1665) onwards (and Guy Oldham, in his edition of Louis Couperin's organ music (2003) even pushes the limits back to *c*. 1650); and it is also a moot point exactly when the 'classical' period ended. As a result I propose to confront traditional terminology and refer to this period's repertory as 'French Baroque', a phrase which counters suggestions of stylistic stability and encourages greater flexibility in our approach to the period's musical developments, reflecting more its dynamic rather than its static character.

This repertory was first rediscovered in the commendable editions by Alexandre Guilmant and André Pirro, made more than a century ago and still available, which are of inestimable historical value. Latterly, inexpensive facsimile editions of many of the original publications and manuscript collections have been published by J.-M. Fuzeau. Sight of the original engravings can be enormously helpful in performing the music, and the clefs are not so difficult to get used to. Furthermore, they provide an opportunity to correct the errors in modern editions, to engage in relevant questions such as the validity of editorial accidentals, and to identify the errors in the original editions that have been reproduced, in some cases, ever since the seventeenth century. The most problematic of the original publications is, paradoxically, the most significant *livre d'orgue* of the period, that of Nicolas de Grigny. This has been published in facsimile together with the copies made by J. G. Walther and J. S. Bach,[11] allowing us to examine not only the faulty engraving of the 1699 edition, but also Walther's and Bach's corrections and adaptations to German taste.

As this book is centred on the genres that constituted the organ masses, Magnificats, Te Deums and suites, a brief account of genre theory is needed: Chapter 2 presents an opportunity to discuss the music in relation to liturgical function, organ registration and compositional procedure. One particular genre, the French *fugue*, has never been adequately discussed, and I believe strongly that it has been misunderstood. All modern accounts of fugue in this period have been dominated by the larger-scale examples by J. S. Bach, even though his compositional priorities were entirely different from those of French composers. Chapter 8 re-evaluates this neglected genre in much greater detail than hitherto.

[11] Nicolas de Grigny, *Premier livre d'orgue* (Paris, 1699); ed. A. Guilmant and A. Pirro, *Archives des maîtres de l'orgue*, vol. v (Paris: Durand, 1904/*R*1972); ed. N. Gorenstein (Fleurier: Editions du Triton, 1994); facsimile edition (Courlay: Fuzeau, 2001).

No account has been included of the keyboard variations on *noëls* (appropriate for both organ and harpsichord) that became very popular at Advent and Christmas (particularly Midnight Mass) from the seventeenth century onwards, and were first published in Gigault's *Livre de musique* (1682) and Lebègue's *Troisième livre d'orgue* (*c*. 1685). The reign of Louis XIV is a very convenient time-span for the study of liturgical organ music, and Jon Laukvik is right to describe it as 'the golden era',[12] but it would have been artificial to truncate the history of *noëls* at 1715. In any case, the subject of organ *noëls* and their context in French social and musical life, both sacred and secular, deserves a separate study.

[12] Jon Laukvik, *Historical Performance Practice in Organ Playing*, trans. Brigitte and Michael Harris from the third revised edition, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Carus, 1989 and 1996), 159.

CHAPTER 2

Genre

We identify the genre to interpret the exemplar.
Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*[1]

The emphasis on genre as a methodology for studying a discrete corpus of repertory is particularly appropriate for French Baroque organ music. Previous accounts have been correct in identifying the French seventeenth-century organ, with its consistency of design and registration schemes, as the primogenitor of the compositional genres that were used throughout the period. Also consistent were the occasions when they were used in the liturgy, in the form of short organ couplets that alternated with voices which sang the plainchant. This *alternatim* practice resulted in solo organ versets that, collectively, constituted the organ masses, canticles, hymns and suites, each organ piece substituting for an omitted liturgical text.

What has been assumed is that this consistency of organ design and liturgical use was paralleled by a more-or-less similar consistency in the compositional style of each genre. It is my conviction that this attitude, reinforced by implications of stability associated with the word 'classical', is too simplistic, and during the course of this book I will attempt to demonstrate that each genre had its own chronological line of development. This 'dynamic' approach makes the task of genre analysis more interesting and revealing. It also helps to distinguish between those genres that were fairly stable, such as the *plein jeu*, and those, such as the *duo*, *trio* and *récit*, which were more malleable.

In the arts, the difficulty of applying a stable system of classification was recognised even in the eighteenth century. Concerning literature, Lord Kames stated:

> Compositions run into each other, precisely like colours: in their strong tints they are easily distinguished; but are susceptible of so much variety, and take so many different forms, that we never can say where one species ends and another begins.[2]

Any distinguishing feature can become the basis for a genre – what Alastair Fowler calls the 'generic repertoire' – although in music, genres are normally

[1] Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 38.
[2] Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism* (Edinburgh, 1762), cited in Fowler, *Literature*, 37.

described by such nouns as sonata, motet, fugue, and so on. In seventeenth-century French organ masses it would be possible to base genres on liturgical text and occasion, organ registration, gross size, formal structure, texture and contrapuntal procedures, but in this repertory such strong relations exist between registration, title, musical character, form, even rhythmic and melodic *figurae*, that in some cases the registrations themselves (often stated as titles) appear to be the best way to classify movements. Thus *plein jeu* may be named as a genre which has particular characteristics of timbre, gross size, texture, harmonic rhythm, tempo and performance practice. Sub-genres can then be derived, for example the *Positif petit plein jeu* and the *Grand Orgue 'gravement' grand plein jeu*, as well as further subdivisions of the latter into those based on plainchant and those being free compositions, illustrated by the opening *pleins jeux* of François Couperin's two organ masses.

Further qualification of both genres and sub-genres can be made with use of what Fowler calls 'generic mode', often referred to by adjectives. For example, one of Couperin's two *Dialogues sur la voix humaine* has fugal elements, although for reasons of formal structure it cannot be designated as a *fugue* in the same sense as Couperin's *Fugue sur la trompette*. The absence of counterpoint in his second *voix humaine dialogue* suggests that the fugal elements in the first are not necessary components, and therefore the fugal imitation can be regarded as a 'mode' of the *voix humaine* genre. A generic mode may therefore exhibit some but not all of the possible features of a genre (in this case, *fugue*), enabling it to dispense with the formal structure that would otherwise qualify it for the status of a genre. Generic modes (in this case fugal imitation) are therefore able to increase the range of features in any particular genre, whereas sub-genres give more precise definition to a genre by restricting its repertory of possible characteristics.

This method of classification (genre – sub-genre – mode) enables comparison and assessment of examples by different composers, as well as comparison of different examples by the same composer. Couperin's two *Dialogues sur la voix humaine*, for example, are so different in structure, style and compositional procedure that this appears intentional: Couperin composed two examples of the same genre in as different a manner as possible. A chronological study of genres also enables us not only to trace lines of development, but also to infer in what ways composers were being conventional or original. Whereas a competent composer could produce grammatically correct but conventional exemplars, a composer of real originality sought new ways of experimenting by modifying, extending or mixing genres, or even by deliberately composing 'against the grain' of expectations associated with a particular genre.

In French Baroque organ music, there were three factors which governed genre: first, the organ and its characteristics; secondly, the liturgy and its requirements; and thirdly, compositional procedures.

THE ORGAN AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

The consistency with which composers made use of such a narrow range of genres is directly related to the concept of the 'ideal' French Baroque organ, as it was being developed in the second half of the seventeenth century. A definition of such an instrument would include, essentially, two contrasting

Ill. 2. St Gervais, Paris. Organ originally by Mathis Langhedul (1601), rebuilt and placed on the tribune by Pierre Pescheur (1628), and played by members of the Couperin dynasty.