

## Prelude and Fantasy for Baroque Lute by Denis Gaultier

The prelude and fantasy presented in the music supplement are drawn from the joint publication of Ennemond and Denis Gaultier<sup>i</sup> of 1672. Within the original publication, each of the pieces is grouped by tonal type and those by Ennemond, Vieux Gaultier, precede those of Denis, Gaultier Le Jeune. The exception to this is when the group includes a prelude, all of which are the work of Denis, who is styled ‘Mr G’ in the print; in these instances the group begins with the prelude. Thus the works in the D minor tonal type begin with a prelude by Denis, are followed by a selection of dance movements by Ennemond, and then comes a group of compositions by Denis, the first of which is the fantasy presented here. From this, it is plausible that the *Prelude de Mr G* may have been intended immediately to precede the *Fantaisies de Mr G*. In any event, the pair make a musically coherent whole and a worthy antecedent of the prelude and fugue pairings so typical of the later Baroque era.

### Some thoughts on the interpretation of the prelude

The prelude has no rhythmic indications and, although the normal visual cues characteristic of Baroque dance forms are absent, the overriding organizational principle of the music is not markedly different from that of the dance movements found elsewhere in the publication. Since one of the prime functions of a prelude is to introduce a tonality - D minor in this case - it is no surprise that the work opens with a chord of D minor. That said, this chord is elaborated through arpeggiation and the notes as they appear in the first section of the work may be seen at Example 1. Moreover, within this part of the work Gaultier introduces some elaborations which may be seen at Example 2; these are marked with slurs. All of this takes place within a framework which is outlined in Example 3; in essence, the first section of the work does nothing other than introduce a D minor harmony. That said, Gaultier seeks to add interest.

The interplay between the motifs of Example 2 is redolent of a conversation in recitative style<sup>ii</sup>, and perhaps Gaultier was mindful of Lully’s operas when composing the piece. These motifs fall into two categories: ascending, and descending. The ascending motifs resemble questions, and the descending, answers<sup>iii</sup>. By fitting words to these questions and answers it is possible to produce a particular interpretation of the first section as shown in the table below.

|                       |                              |                                 |                 |                      |                               |              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Person 1:<br>(treble) | Shall I<br>play the<br>lute? |                                 | Lute I<br>said! |                      | Shall I<br>play the<br>flute? | Lute I said! |
| Person 2:<br>(bass)   |                              | Shall you<br>play the<br>flute? |                 | Lute<br>you<br>said! |                               |              |

By avoiding the alternative motifs at Example 4 the composer deliberately sets up an expectation which is subsequently thwarted. One way of playing the opening phrase is given at Example 5; this intended to convey the impression of improvisation and it is helped if the ornament on (2) is played as a long trill. The response to this, the first question of the table is Motif 1a, seeks to clarify the question. If the rhythms of everyday speech were adopted then the second motif might well be at a different speed to the initial enquiry; so too would there be a slight accent on the final note.

The 'Lute I said' motifs are more declamatory; nonetheless, the use of rubato within the context of these phrases is helpful in the interpretation of the work, as is permitting the music to breathe. The ornaments falling on the second note of each phrase should all be played in a similar style. Apart from where there is overlap in the motifs,<sup>iv</sup> a short pause on the final note of each phrase may give a pleasing result provided it is not overdone.

It is worthwhile playing the first section using only even notes and comparing this with an interpretation mirroring a dialogue between two people. Concerning the latter, it is important to avoid letting the music fragment; the near total reliance on one harmony – the D minor arpeggiated as in Examples 1 and in harmonic context at 3 - helps avoid this.

Owing to the fact that the first section of the work is complete in itself, there is a challenge in linking together the first two sections. The composer was mindful of this and the ornaments seen in Example 6 should be treated in a similar way; this will help the music flow into the second section.

In Example 7 there is a linear progression<sup>v</sup> in the bass which starts with the a on (5) and ends with the a on (10); such descents offer a means of creating interest and, to Gaultier, a means of conveying the sense of improvisation which is achieved by varying the number of notes between each step of the descent. In Example 8 the descent is marked with strokes for the thumb and, for the purposes of understanding the work, it is worthwhile playing only these notes to establish the context of the passage. Next, play the entire passage with notes of equal value; clearly, this sounds disjointed to no good effect. In Example 7 there are two pauses marked and it can be seen that the upper voice jumps an octave after the first of these<sup>vi</sup>; this provides information which can be used to aid interpretation. The passage can be seen as comprising two phrases. To my taste, I like to play the first of these with a slight *accelerando*, and the second with a *rallentando* having long trills at the end of the music following the (9) and (10) courses sounded open. The final bar of Example 8 I like to play very loudly and pause on the chord.

It will be noted that so far in the piece almost all the music is based upon descending phrases and progressions; since this may lead to the impression of imbalance it is unsurprising that Gaultier includes some ascending music. In Example 9 the ascending music counterbalances the preceding section; the finale cadence at Example 10 closes the work. This cadence is typically Baroque and it would not be out of place in the work of Weiss, or J S Bach; the suggested rhythm implies a significant slowing down as the work ends. This is one of the most dissonant sections of the work and the tritone of e on (3) followed by c on (4) – which occurs twice in Example 10 – creates the tension which is finally resolved onto the D minor harmony. Within a tonal framework, dissonance creates the need for resolution. In a works such as this prelude, the wish for resolution creates opportunity to convey an air of improvisation by delay.

In Example 11 the skeleton of the piece is given. In addition to its structural significance, it is also an effective means of testing the tuning of the D minor Baroque Lute. The notes given above the tablature are not here intended to convey rhythm but they mark the structure such that the longer the note, the greater its importance to the organisation of the whole<sup>vii</sup>.

### **Some Rules of Thumb for Playing Preludes**

Although there can be no substitute for having a thorough knowledge of music theory, unbarred preludes often present some recognizable features which can aid interpretation and

help shape a performance of the music. Given below are a few very simple rules of thumb, which some may find helpful.

### Initial sketching

Since preludes often introduce a tonality, when faced with a score lacking rhythmic indications, mark out the arpeggio of the tonic chord (see Example 1). Frequently, the notes will fall on the accent but, if there are indications of right-hand fingerings where the index finger is employed, this will override the accent suggestion. From Example 2, it can be seen that many of the phrases end on a note of the D minor arpeggio; again this is worth investigating when looking over a prelude for the first time. Sometimes, there will be other harmonies; these are harder to spot but the music at Example 3 gives these from the Gaultier work. Note that the D minor harmonies begin and end the progression; once the tonality has been introduced it is commonplace for the music to move away from the home key.

Given below is a list of the works in the D minor tonal type from the publication in question and the harmonies at key structural points. With the exception of the Canaries and the Fantaisies, all works comprise two sections, the last of which always ends on D minor<sup>viii</sup> and the first of which ends on either A major or F major.

| Work                 | Composer       | Section(s) ending on |         | Final closure                     |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|
| Tombeau de Mezangeau | Vieux Gaultier | A major              |         | D (with Picardy 3 <sup>rd</sup> ) |
| Gigue                | ditto          | F major              |         | D minor                           |
| Allemande            | ditto          | A major              |         | D minor                           |
| Courante [1]         | ditto          | A major              |         | D minor                           |
| Courante [2]         | ditto          | A major              |         | D minor                           |
| Canaries             | ditto          | D minor              | D minor | D minor                           |
| Fantaisies           | Mr G.          | D minor              | F major | D (with Picardy 3 <sup>rd</sup> ) |
| Gigue                | ditto          | A major              |         | D minor                           |
| Courante [1]         | ditto          | A major              |         | D minor                           |
| Courante [2]         | ditto          | A major              |         | D minor                           |
| Courante [3]         | ditto          | A major              |         | D minor                           |
| Sarabande            | ditto          | F major              |         | D minor                           |

Since the musical organisation for most<sup>x</sup> of the above movements is the same as that of the prelude, it is a reasonable expectation that within the prelude will be phrases ending on D minor, F Major or A major. Looking at Examples 7 and 8, it is apparent that there are two short phrases each of which ends on A major. The way the music reaches the final A major of these is worthy of note: a linear descent through a perfect interval followed by a skip to one of the common tonal goals, A Major. Such descents often move through a fourth, a fifth or an octave and, occasionally, the final pitch of the descent is elaborated. Thus a descent similar to the one of Gaultier might follow the pattern: D, C, Bb ... F, E (C#) D. When the latter occurs, the D will probably be the goal. It will be noted from the above table that one of the frequent goals of the tonality, F major, does not appear in the work. The only glimpse is to be found in Example 7 immediately after the first pause sign, some players may wish highlight this.

### Linear progressions

It is worth marking the bass notes to check for linear progressions and noting where these end; the chances are it will be at one of the harmonies frequently found at the double bar lines of the other movements in the same tonality or the dominant of such a harmony<sup>x</sup>. When the goal of the progression has been identified, look at the music which comes between the last

goal and the new one. Play the section as though it were a complete sentence of prose; find words to fit if this will help.

Linear ascents occur in Baroque preludes and some works make use of sequences to achieve similar ends. Example 13 is drawn for a prelude by S L Weiss; observe the ascending section which is balanced by a descending one. The ascent in the bass, is through an octave and it is worth considering playing in a similar manner every appearance of the phrases which are repeated in sequence. Thus the first eight notes of Example 12 may set the style for the second, third and fourth groups of eight notes. The second part of the bass progression, a on (7), initiates a descending sequence of a differing pattern which moves through a perfect fifth; again, it is worth considering keeping each statement of the phrase a similar shape. Note the slower pace of the decent: each ascending step has four notes whereas each descending step has eight. There is information in this statement and it is worth considering a gradual increase in pace for the ascending section, and a gradual decrease in tempo for the descending part. The reverse may also be used to good effect.

### **Balance**

Balance is a key aspect of performance as well as composition. The Weiss fragment of Example 12 is carefully balanced in terms of musical structure; it should also be balanced in terms of performance. A simple rule of thumb in performance concerning rubato is that if you take additional time in one place, you should take it from elsewhere. Thus if you go slower in one part, consider going quicker in another.

### **Letting the music breathe**

A key feature of all good performances is attention to phrasing. Despite the fact that many lute preludes lack the visual cues found in almost all other forms, they still contain phrases, sentences, and paragraphs; unlike many other forms, however, these important musical features are often of unequal length. The opening sentence of this paragraph does not fall neatly into any regular metre although its meaning is perfectly clear. If it is read without pausing, the result may be pleasing. Many alternatives produce equally valid and comprehensible results: a KEY feature of all GOOD performances is attention to PHRASING; a key feature OF ALL GOOD PERFORMANCES is attention to phrasing; a key feature ... of all good performances ... is attention to phrasing. Within preludes, the composer gives the performer even more latitude than in this example. Provided the performer can recognise what is going on in the structure, the parameters of that latitude may be mapped out.

### **Prelude in G minor by S L Weiss**

Example 13 gives the complete prelude from Suite no 3. Although it is clearly a more sophisticated work than the Gaultier discussed above, within the Weiss almost every key characteristic of the Gaultier is to be found in identical functional form. Before playing through the piece, take some time to mark out the recognizable structural features listed below.

| <b>Weiss G minor prelude</b>                  | <b>Equivalent in Gaultier D minor prelude</b> |
|---|---|
| Establish tonality                            | Cf Exx 1 & 3                                  |
| Move away via a linear descent                | Cf Ex 7                                       |
| Balance descending motifs with ascending ones | See Ex 9                                      |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Sequential progression starting on 3 <sup>rd</sup> system with bass note on '4' | Hinted at in Ex 9, although the idea owes more to the Italian musical style |
| Linked passage at key structural point  | Cf Ex 6   |
| Elaborate final cadential progression   | Cf Ex 10  |

### Some final thoughts

Although the above may only begin to scratch the surface of the topic, it is worthwhile listening for similar features in recordings, not only of lute music but also of other instruments and ensembles. Of the great many witticisms attributed to Sir Thomas Beecham at least one may be relevant here: 'The English may not like music; but they absolutely love the noise it makes.' Whilst the noise may yield enjoyment and pleasure from both listening and playing, getting beneath the surface offers new challenges and possibilities which can provide not only a better understanding of music per se but also an improved level of performance.

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<sup>i</sup> *Livre de tablature des pieces de luth de Mr Gaultier Sr. de neue et de Mr Gaultier son cousin ...* (Paris, 1672) facsimile edition, Minkoff (Geneva, 1975).

<sup>ii</sup> The appearance of the second motif in the bass, for example, includes notes which may be considered to provide accompaniment. Thus the notes on (3) and (2) fulfil a different function from those on (4).

<sup>iii</sup> This is in line with most musico-rhetorical descriptions. For example, according to Christoph Bernhard 'Questions, according to common usage, are ended a step higher than the penultimate syllable'. See 'The Treatises of Christoph Bernhard', trans Walter Hilse, *The Music Forum*, III (New York, 1973). In practice, composers often increased the width of the interval; to enhance dramatic effect.

<sup>iv</sup> The second phrase of the treble overlaps that of the first in the bass.

<sup>v</sup> The music descends by step as follows: D, C, Bb, A etc.

<sup>vi</sup> This is to say that the Bb occurs at f on (1), rather than b on (3).

<sup>vii</sup> This kind of structural analysis was developed by Heinrich Schenker, and further developed by his student, Felix Salzer, who also analysed pieces by Dowland and anonymous lute works.

<sup>viii</sup> The *Tombeau* ends with a Picardy 3<sup>rd</sup>, or substitution of a D major harmony within the context of a D minor composition.

<sup>ix</sup> The organisation of the *fantaisies* is contrapuntal rather than harmonic. Salzer identified three models of musical organisation: contrapuntal, harmonic, and a combination of the two. The *fantaisies* falls into the latter category; all the other works in the table fall into the second category.

<sup>x</sup> The Weiss fragment of Example 12 ends on the dominant of the tonality of F major, this is the equivalent of the music of Example 10 up to and including the final crotchet. In the Gaultier publication, a prelude in G major includes a section ending on the dominant; this is marked by a minim.