

The Sound of Angelic Voices: Sacred Music for High Voices in 17th-century France

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Introduction

To understand sacred art (whether it be music, architecture, dance, drama, literature, painting or sculpture), one needs to examine the work within its original context: to look at the work of art in isolation is to lose an essential part of its original purpose and meaning. An altarpiece in a museum may look beautiful and it may teach us about the techniques used by the artist, but an essential aspect of its creation and purpose is missing (Maland, 1970). In its original form, it was inextricably linked to the altar above which it hung. It served to edify those present at the liturgical celebration: it was a tool in the hands of the Church, rather than solely an object to be admired and enjoyed. To understand 17th-century French sacred music, we need to understand something of the context in which it was initially conceived.

Religious Life in 17th-century France

Reciting the Divine Office was central to the life of a contemplative nun, and on major feast-days, it was customary to sing, rather than simply recite, the Offices of Matins and Vespers. Throughout the 17th century, there are references to nuns singing the Offices, and at many convents musical instruction was a part of daily life.¹ There are also references to nuns singing motets, particularly during the Elevation of the Host at Mass and at the devotional service of *Salut* (or Benediction). This is confirmed by the repertory of music known to have been composed for convents by 17th-century composers.²

During the Counter-Reformation, the arts were used in often extravagant and dramatic ways to create an overwhelming sense of religious feeling which embodied the ideals of the Catholic Church. Music, alongside the other arts, served an important didactic and devotional function in leading the faithful to achieving communion with God.

There was, however, a dichotomy in elevated 17th-century French society: on the one hand, there was the pomp and ceremony of Court, marked by frivolity and artificiality; on the other hand, there was incredible religious fervour found in the convents and other religious establishments, at which members of Court society (including Charpentier's two wealthy patrons, the Guise princesses) spent many hours of each day.³ At many convents, such as those influenced by Jansenism, the austerity of the religious life contrasted dramatically with the life of Court.

In keeping with Counter-Reformation ideology, emphasis was placed on devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the penitential rites, as well as the veneration of saints. In many Orders, there was both the influence of asceticism and mysticism. The ascetics believed in the importance of self-humiliation, self-denial, and penance, often witnessed through the practice of flagellation.⁴ Art associated with asceticism, such as the paintings of Philippe de Champaigne, is characterised by a sense of simplicity and austerity, sometimes even severity and a shunning of sensual experience.

The mystics, particularly influenced by St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross, emphasized the power of love as a means of uniting the soul with God in a spiritual marriage: deep contemplation lead to ecstasy.⁵ In the writings of the mystics, the vocabulary used often shares the same imagery one finds in contemporary love poetry—a theme that recurs in the texts used for Elevation motets.

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was seen in the popular evening service of *Salut* (Benediction) at which the Host was venerated, and hymns, litanies and motets (often in honour of the Blessed Virgin) were sung. In some convents, such as Saint-Cyr, the service

also included a setting of the *Domine, salvum fac regem*, sung in honour of the King (Kauffman, 2001b, xiii).⁶ Charpentier composed a *Domine salvum* (H. 288) setting for three nuns from the Abbaye-au-Bois. This motet appears in Charpentier's *cahier* [19] of the *Meslanges autographes* alongside a Marian motet (H. 322)—probably for use at *Salut*.⁷

The religious practices of convents within Paris differed widely depending on the Order, and clearly this affected the type of music used within the establishment. These preferences are reflected closely both in the type of text being set and in the style of music written by composers such as Charpentier.

Contemporaries of Charpentier Writing for Convents in Paris

There is an extensive repertory of music written for high voices by leading 17th-century French composers, such as Charpentier, Couperin, Nivers and Clérambault. Much of this music was intended for use within Parisian convents by both religious and lay musicians. Many of the convents (as well as other churches in Paris) hired professional musicians to perform at religious services. Lecerf de la Viéville made some scathing remarks about this practice:

One pays them to perform the most pious and solemn Motets.... one hires singers, who sing a *Leçon* on Good Friday or a solo motet for Easter behind a curtain that they draw apart from time to time to smile at their friends among the listeners. (Lecerf, *Comparaison*, III, p. 162, as cited in Kauffman, 2001a, p. 248)

He adds that, on such occasions, it was necessary to pay for a seat in the Church, just as at the Opéra, and that he had even heard applause at some of the services. Certainly, performances at the convents were regarded as great musical attractions during the 17th century—a fact reflected by the number of comments found in the *Mercure Galant* and the *Gazette de France* which recount visits by members of the nobility and royal family to musical performances at convents in Paris.

The comment by Lecerf contrasts markedly with a letter written in 1674 by the Archbishops of Paris noting that:

We strictly forbid all Superiors of churches and chapels in our diocese...to allow the singing, in chorus or with instruments, of any music during Tenebrae. (as cited in Cessac, 1988, p. 155)

It appears that this proscription was ignored by many churches and chapels.

The Offices of *Ténèbres* were some of the most popular devotional services in 17th-century France. During Holy Week, crowds flocked to hear settings of the beautifully moving Lamentations of Jeremiah by composers such as Lambert, Charpentier, Couperin, and Lalande. These settings exude intensity, reflection and devotion, and are written in a style that fuses distinctively French elements with an Italian approach to expression.

Nivers and Clérambault both composed music for the Augustinian nuns of the Maison Royale de Saint-Louis at Saint-Cyr.⁸ The *petits motets* written for Saint-Cyr are simple settings for solo voices or for alternating passages of solo voice and unison or two-part chorus. Many of the works show the influence of chant as well as the influence of the secular *air de cour*. These influences are most apparent in the style of melodic writing, in the choice of ornamentation, and in the narrow range employed.

François Couperin composed Tenebrae music for the nuns of Longchamps near Paris—a convent founded in the 13th century by St. Isabelle of France, sister of St. Louis, and renowned for the high quality of its music. The Tenebrae settings follow in a tradition established by Lambert and Charpentier. The style is marked by elaborate written-out ornamentation, virtuosity and lyricism.⁹

Convents and Other Religious Establishments for which Charpentier Composed Music of Female Voices

Charpentier composed over 100 works for high voices. In addition to providing sacred music for his regular employers,¹⁰ Charpentier composed music for the Cistercians of the Port-Royal de Paris¹¹ and the Abbaye-au-Bois,¹² the Benedictines of the Abbaye of Montmartre (at which Mlle de Guise's sister was the Abbess), and he almost certainly composed music for the Carmelites of the rue du Bouloir or the Grand Couvent in the rue Saint-Jacques since the Guise princesses attended services at these convents, often as part of Queen Marie-Thérèse's entourage.¹³ Charpentier identifies a number of different singers on works for high voices in his *Meslanges autographes*. In addition to identifying musicians from the Guise household and *castrati* who sang at the Jesuit Church of St Louis, Charpentier identifies singers from the Abbaye-au-Bois (H. 96-110, H. 288, H. 322 and possibly H. 240), and the Port-Royal de Paris (H. 256, H. 5, H. 15, H. 62, H. 81 and H. 226-227).

Genres of Settings for High Voices

Charpentier's music for high voices includes a wide range of genres: one Mass setting and one sequence (a setting of the Stabat Mater for the nuns of the Port-Royal), various hymns, antiphons, Magnificats, psalm settings, *Domine salvum* settings, Elevation motets, motets for specific occasions, dramatic motets/*histoires sacrées* and *leçons et répons de ténèbres*.

Genre by Charpentier	Number of works for high voices out of total	
<i>Leçons/Répons de ténèbres</i>	28/53	(52%)
Occasional motets (OM)	25/85	(29%)
Elevation motets (E)	22/48	(46%)
Antiphons (A)	16/37	(43%)
Hymns (H)	7/19	(37%)
Domine salvum settings (D)	6/23	(26%)
Psalm settings (P)	4/85	(5%)
Dramatic motet/ <i>Histoires sacrées</i> (DM)	3/34	(9%)
Magnificat (M)	2/10	(20%)
Mass setting	1/11	(9%)
Sequence (S)	1/4	(25%)

There are no settings of the Te Deum or Litanies for high voices. When writing for high voices, there is a preference for settings of the *Leçons et Répons de ténèbres* (performances of which were very popular in Parisian convents during Holy Week), and settings of motets and antiphons. The motets would have been performed para-liturgically during the Mass (particularly at the Elevation of the Host), during Vespers and at devotional services (such as *Salut*). When compared with works written by Charpentier, for example for the Jesuits, where the preference is for music written directly for the liturgy (such as

psalm settings and Magnificats), the emphasis in the settings for high voices reflects the devotional practices in convents and at Hôtel de Guise.

Texts

Many of the motet texts set by Charpentier were written by unknown authors (rather than taken directly from the liturgy). Like the writings of the mystics, they draw on imagery equally associated with love poetry as with religious devotion. Some of these texts, particularly those used as Elevation motets, are expansions of prayers that form part of the liturgy or devotions, such as *O pretiosum et admirabile convivium* or *Transfige dulcissime Jesu* (the prayer of St. Bonaventure). Such expansions were following the tradition of medieval tropes—expansions of existing texts, often for the purpose of interpreting the words and expanding upon their meaning. Many of the texts are written in a semi-erotic, mystical idiom. Other texts relate directly to particular saints, and often draw on biblical texts for their inspiration.

Style of Writing and Influences

Charpentier's works for high voices represent a wide range of different styles, from the simplest, syllabic settings for solo voice using a narrow melodic range (such as *Pange lingua*, H. 62), to highly elaborate and virtuosic motets written in the most modern and often Italianate 17th-century style (such as "Flores O Gallia," H. 342). Charpentier, for example, composed a set of four motets for two sopranos, entitled *Quatuor Anni Tempestates* (H. 335-338),¹⁴ with words from the Song of Songs—that most sensual of texts from the Bible. These works capture the spirit of the Counter-Reformation in their assault on the senses. Close imitation between the two sopranos (often at the unison in canonic style), melismatic, virtuosic and ornamented melodic lines, dramatic and expressive examples of word painting, and a wide vocal range are characteristics typical of Italian, rather than French writing.

Even in the simplest settings, however, the context and the nature of the text strongly influenced the musical style adopted by Charpentier who paid close attention to the rhythm, syntax and meaning of the text.

Examples of Music for Convents

Even when Charpentier was composing for one particular convent, he used a wide range of styles. For example, he composed seven works for the Port-Royal. The setting of the *Pange lingua* (H. 62) and the *Stabat mater* (H. 15) are the simplest of the seven stylistically, alternating verses for solo voice with verses for a unison chorus, and are closest in style to some of Nivers's simple settings of liturgical music. The writing is syllabic throughout, with simple ornamentation on stressed syllables, and a narrow melodic range (which rarely exceeds e^2). Each verse is sung to the same music.

The Mass setting for the Port-Royal (H. 5) also alternates a soloist (sometimes two soloists singing in unison) and a unison chorus. Occasionally, Charpentier includes part-writing—each instance being inspired by the text. For example, in the Credo at the words "et incarnatus est de spiritu sancto ex Maria Virgine" (the most significant moment in the Creed), Charpentier writes for three solo voices. The change of texture corresponds with a change in metre and a slowing down of the rhythmic pace to heighten the impact of the words.

Although the writing is essentially syllabic throughout the Mass setting, Charpentier includes some occasional melismatic writing, such as in the Credo (at the words "et resurrexit"), and in the Sanctus—a style quite different from the rest of the Mass. He also includes some exuberant melismatic imitative writing for two sopranos in the offertory for St. Marguerite.

The Magnificat (H. 81) and two psalm settings (H. 226 and H. 227) are both written for three solo voices which alternate with a fauxbourdon chorus in four parts: the top line

sung by two nuns, the second line sung by one nun, and the third and fourth lines sung by a divided chorus. Unlike the other works for the Port-Royal, the passages for solo voices contrast with those written for the chorus.

Charpentier composed one other work for the Port-Royal: "O clementissime" (H. 256) is a poignantly beautiful *da capo* motet intended (as indicated by Charpentier on the score) for use at the Elevation.¹⁵ It is scored for three solo voices heard individually in the central section and together in the outer sections. The setting of the exclamatory "O" that begins this and so many of the Elevation motets, draws the listener, through the music, into ardent devotion and adoration. One can sense the reverential intensity of the moment: the Cistercian nuns kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament.

The central section includes two passages of recitative-like writing (reminiscent of Carissimi) characterized by affective intervals, dissonant harmonies and a quickening of the rhythmic pace. These sections contrast vividly with a lively triple-metre passage in arioso style. In this motet for the nuns of the Port-Royal, Charpentier employs an expressive musical language quite different from that used in the other works for the convent—a style that, at times, seems in conflict with the austerity of the Port-Royal.

Range

The range used for the motets for high voices is fairly consistent throughout the works:

Clef	Range	Remarks
G2	$d^1 - a^2$	most of the motets, particularly the simpler settings tend to stay in the range of $f^1 - g^2$
C1	$d^1 - g^2$	most of the motets, particularly the simpler settings tend to stay in the range of $d^1 - e^2$
C2	$c\sharp^1 - e^2$	
C3	$f - b^1$	<i>f</i> is rare

Role of Voices

With the exception of some of the three-voice motets, where the lowest voice shares the harmonic role of the continuo, Charpentier treats all the voices equally. The lowest voice in the three-part works plays a dual role: sometimes it is entirely independent of the continuo, such as in *Salve Regina* (H. 18); at other times, it is doubled by the continuo, such as in *O sacrum [convivium] a 3* (H. 239). In many of the motets, the lowest voice alternates between these two roles. In these motets, the lowest voice does not, however, simply fulfill the role of harmonic bass. The voice is treated melodically, often in imitation with the upper voices. It is the continuo doubling the vocal part, rather than the voice doubling as harmonic bass.¹⁶ In terms of melodic shape, there is nothing to distinguish the lowest voice from the other voices.¹⁷

"Flores O Gallia," *Pour Ste Thérèse* (H. 342)

Charpentier composed two works specifically for St. Theresa, both of which are written for high voices.¹⁸ St. Theresa, a Carmelite nun in 16th-century Spain, was one of the most popular saints of the Counter-Reformation.¹⁹ "Flores O Gallia" was probably written for the Carmelite convent in the rue du Bouloir. There is evidence that the Guise princesses attended services there as part of Queen Marie-Thérèse's entourage, including attending

celebrations of the Queen's feast-day—the feast of St. Theresa.²⁰ Mlle de Guise owned “a pair of paintings representing women in ecstasy or meditation: St. Theresa of Avila and the repentant Magdalene” which hung on the walls in her apartment in the Hôtel de Guise²¹ (Ranum, P. *Preface to: The “Regular” Life of Two Devout Princesses*). It is interesting that both St. Theresa and the repentant Magdalene feature in the art work owned by the Guises, as did a book recounting the life of St. Thesesa, and as they do in the motets written by Charpentier.

In her autobiography, St. Theresa described her experience of ecstasy as follows:

Beside me on the left appeared an angel in bodily form.... In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. *This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated my entrails. When he pulled it out I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul content with anything but God. This is not a physical but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it—even a considerable share.* (Cornaro Chapel)

The text for the motet, “Flores O Gallia” reads as follows, with the section most closely related to the extract from the autobiography indicated in italics:

1. O France, scatter the flowers and lilies with generous hands.
 2. O peoples, pluck the lyre, take up the lute and the cymbals.
 3. Sing, you saints, on this solemn feast of Theresa; sing to the virgin, sing to the lover.
 4. *During her life she would groan under the weight of love: while she fervently prayed, she would grow faint, pierced by the arrow of love.*
 5. And now in heaven the faithful wife, beloved, blessed Theresa, filled with the joy of love, exults, lives and reigns with Christ her beloved.
- [In the motet, there is a return to line 2 to conclude the work.]

“Flores O Gallia” is a highly Italianate motet. As in many Roman motets by composers such as Carissimi, Luigi Rossi and Graziani, Charpentier uses a refrain to create a balanced structure: ABCDB. The motet opens with imitative, almost canonic, melismatic writing between the two highest voices—a style immediately reminiscent of Carissimi's motets and cantatas. It is an appropriately jubilant, ornate and florid setting of the text by the unidentified author in which he summons France to scatter flowers and play music in celebration of the feast of St. Theresa.

Lines 2 and 3 of the text are set in a triple-metre passage which exudes dance-like qualities, including a lilting, syllabic setting of the text, a simpler more homophonic texture and the use of diatonic harmony. The third (and central) section sets the text most closely linked with the extract from St Theresa's autobiography in which she describes the moment of ecstasy. This is the most dramatic section of the motet, and is written in a contrasting quadruple metre, marked “adagio.”

Inspired by the text, Charpentier writes an affective melodic line which, at first, is fragmented then is expanded to a melismatic setting of “gemebat” (groan) and “languebat” (grow faint). Of particular significance (bearing in mind the use of mean-tone temperament in 17th-century France), is the expressive use of E♯ moving to A in the first phrase and A♯ moving to D in the second. Also, Charpentier uses a diminished fifth to set the word “oppressa” (under the weight) in the first phrase and “transfixa” (pierced) in the second. Within this central section, Charpentier creates a balanced structure by setting parallel parts of the text to the same music (though at a new pitch):

dum vitam ducebat	a
amoris pondere oppressa gemebat	b
dum fervens orabat	a' (up 4 th)
amoris vulnere transfixa languebat	b' (up 4 th)

Charpentier's use of this type of parallel structure to create a musical pattern of aba'b', his use of contrast, expressive and affective melismatic writing and the use of some intense dissonance is typical of the types of musical devices used by Italian composers of the mid-17th century. Just as Bernini's sculpture of St. Theresa captures the ecstasy described by the saint in her autobiography—an experience that uses imagery taken from sexual as well as religious experiences, particularly the sense of physical fulfillment—so Charpentier's music captures that same sense of the fervour of St. Theresa's ecstatic experience through the use of tortuous intervals, piercing dissonances and a threnodic rhythm combined to evoke the feeling of ecstasy.²²

After the intensity of the central section, Charpentier returns to an exultant triple-metre section for a solo soprano. The use of triadic intervals and a strong harmonic bass line help to define the joyful mood of this section. In addition, Charpentier writes a melodic line that ascends up the octave from *f*#¹ for the words "plena triumphant vivat regnat." He concludes the phrase with an ascending melisma for "beata Theresia." There is then a return to the B section.

Magdalens lugens (H. 343)

During the 17th century, Mary Magdalene received a passionate cult following in France. It was believed that after the Crucifixion, Mary Magdalene travelled to southern France where she spent the remaining years of her life in a cave in solitude and devotion. Mary Magdalene is frequently depicted in the visual arts by French artists such as Georges de la Tour, Philippe de Champaigne, Guy François, and Simon Vouet.²³ She is portrayed both as religious follower and lover. The imagery used by these artists evokes a feeling of solitude, intense religious devotion, sometimes combined with a sense of the erotic, as well as a reminder of the transiency of life.²⁴

Charpentier composed three pieces in honour of St. Mary Magdalene, two of which (H. 373 and H. 343) appear to be companion pieces to the works written in honour of St. Theresa and may well have been performed at the Carmelite convent.²⁵ H. 343, *Magdalens lugens* (H. 343) is scored for a solo soprano, two treble instruments and continuo.²⁶

The motet opens with a reference to Mary Magdalene alone and grieving in the cave. Charpentier conveys this sense of solitude through the melodic and harmonic writing: a triadic melodic line outlining an E minor chord, with an ornamental figure on "lugens" (weeping) that concludes on a 4-2 chord, thus leaving the phrase incomplete in terms of the harmony. Throughout this passionate lament, Charpentier creates affective Italianate melodic lines of great beauty and power: falling minor thirds, diminished fourths and an augmented fifth chord are used as a means of textual expression.

For the words of Mary Magdalene ("O my beloved, my heart and my joy, what can I give in return for your love that made you deliver yourself to redeem the world?")—words that are used as a refrain later in the motet—Charpentier changes to triple metre for a lyrical, syllabic setting of the text. The sense of yearning is emphasized by the way in which Charpentier breaks up the melodic line (almost hoquet-style) with rests, almost as though the singer is weeping.

With the return of the refrain, Charpentier greatly intensifies the expressive power of the line, particularly through the increase in dissonance and the poignantly affective melodic writing which reaches a climax at the final repetition of the words "amor meus" (my beloved). This is no mere repetition; rather this is repetition used as a rhetorical-musical device.

Towards the close of the motet, just prior to the final return of the refrain, Charpentier writes a short passage (just eight bars) of recitative which is inspired directly by the writing of composers such as Carissimi. Here, we have all the hallmarks of mid-17th century Roman sacred music: the rhetorical repetition of "heu" (alas) over a static bass, and the leap down a minor sixth onto an intense dissonance (a major seventh) which is repeated for all but the last sixteenth note of the second bar for the words, "He is pierced with nails and the spear." Images of 17th-century paintings depicting the Crucifixion leap to mind.

In this motet, we hear the same intense expression as we see in the paintings of La Tour and others. In true Counter-Reformation style, Charpentier convincingly draws the listener into the drama and emotion of Mary Magdalene's plight: alone, repentant, grieving at the loss of her beloved.

Concluding Remarks

The 17th century marked a period of spiritual renewal and growth in France. As in contemporary religious poetry and art, Charpentier (particularly in his Elevation motets) draws on a semi-erotic idiom to lead the listener to an intensity and fervour of religious experience: a feeling of intensity, intimacy, even ecstasy leading to communion with God. His music is not merely a reflection of the religious experience; it was intended as a means towards it.

Appendix

References to the liturgy and singing at the Port-Royal de Paris

Although, like other religious communities in Paris, the nuns of the Port-Royal de Paris were required to follow the Parisian Rite, in 1680 the community requested permission from the Archbishop of Paris to alter the order of psalms used within the convent:

A la fin du mois d'Août [1680] la Communauté qui avoit pris le nouveau Bréviaire de Paris, que M. de Harlai venoit de donner, lui présenta une Requête, où après l'avoir fait à son Diocèse, on lui demande une grace: qu'il soit permis de ne pas suivre le rit du Bréviaire pour les Pseaumes propres à chaque fête de Saints; mais de dire tous les jours, fête ou non, les Pseaumes de la Ferie. Il y avoit déjà longtems qu'elles avoient pensé à demander cette permission, parce qu'elles désiroient se conformer au chap. 18 de la Règle de saint Benoît, qui laissant la liberté de suivre telle distribution des Pseaumes qu'on voudra, preferit de réciter tout le Pseautier chaque semaine. La permission leur fut accordée au commencement d'octobre. (Besoigne, J. 1752-55, vol. II, p. 556)

During the 1670s, there are references to reforms undertaken in the singing of chant by the nuns of the Port-Royal, and there is reference to the use of the viol as an accompaniment to the singing of motets within the convent:

c'étoit de recommander à ses jeunes filles de prendre toujours le chant très-haut, afin que les Anciennes ny pouvant pas atteindre, fussent obligées de se taire, & de laisser chanter les autres pausément: & qu'ainsi la décence & la gravité se rétablissent peu à peu dans l'Office divin. (Besoigne, J. 1752-55, vol. I, p. 229)

and

Il [un Bénéficiaire de N-D] leur fit quelques motets qu'elles chantèrent à certaines Fêtes, quelques-fois avec l'accompagnement de la viole de M. le Bénéficiaire. (Besoigne, J. 1752-55, vol. I, p. 302)

In *L'image d'une religieuse parfaite, et d'une imparfaite* (Paris 1665, p. 340), Mère Agnès wrote that: Souvenez-vous, quand vous chantez seule au choeur, que vous êtes en la présence des Anges & de Dieu même: gardez-vous également de le faire avec négligence, ou avec affection, l'une et l'autre déplaisant également à Dieu, & mal-édifiant également ceux qui l'entendent.... Lors donc que vous chantez les louanges de Dieu, faites-le de tout votre coeur, & le mieux que vous pourrez, avec humilité, & simplicité, ne pensant à plaire à vous-même, ni à personne; mais seulement à parler à Dieu, & à faire votre devoir.... Dieu n'écoute pas tant le son de la voix, que les mouvements d'amour d'une âme qui l'adore en esprit et en vérité. (Quoted in Davy-Rigaux, 424-25 and Barenne, 125)

In *Les Constitutions de Port-Royal du Saint-Sacrement* (Mons 1665), p.229:
il faut chanter en la présence des Anges (Quoted in Barenne, 126)

Descriptions of the Port-Royal

Writing in 1713, Germain Brice, described the monastery of the Port-Royal in the following terms:

On verra une église tres-jolie, laquelle quoique de petite étendue, renferme cependant des beautés qui ne se rencontrent pas toujours dans les plus grands fabriques.... Dans l'église de ces religieuses on conserve une épine de la couronne de Nôtre-Seigneur, en faveur de laquelle il s'est fait de

grands miracles, reconnus universellement de tous ceux qui en ont été, pour ainsi dire, les témoins oculaires. (393)

A similar description of the convent was written in 1724 by Sauval:

Il n'y a rien de si propre, l'architecture en est très agreable & des mieux entendues: sa maniere à la verité est assés bisarre, mais fort galante et commode... le St Sacrement est suspendu en l'air, ainsi que dans la Primitive Eglise, & tient à une Crosse de bronze doré à feu, faite par Perlan. Elle a ceci de particulier, qu'elle n'est pas comme les autres, attachée à une potence; mais fort droite; d'ailleurs garnie de quantité de couleurs qui font un très-bel effet; & de plus enrichie de feuilles, fort tendres, conduites & disposées avec autant d'esprit que d'adresse pour le moins: & l'art y est si grand que non seulement le Saint Ciboire paroît suspendu en l'air, mais encore se descend sans bruit & sans cri. (425)

References to Carmelite convents

Sa Majesté voulant donner à la Reyne, sa très chère épouse et compagne, de mettre à effet ses bons desirs et pieuses intentions, auroit dit et déclaré et voulu que la maison de communauté de la rue du Bouloi, qui avoit esté establie pour retraite et refuge aux Religieuses et Carmélites du Grand Couvent du fauxbourg Saint-Jacques, fust à l'avenir un monastère de Religieuses distinct... Dame Reyne seroit fondatrice, pour y faire commodément des retraites spirituelles (Biver, P. and M-L. 1975, p. 424)

Queen Marie-Thérèse regularly attended services at the Carmelite convent in the rue du Bouloir.

References to the Abbaye-au-Bois

The Abbaye-au-Bois shared many similarities with the convent of Saint-Cyr, including the division of students into different classes identified by the colour of their uniforms. The nuns and students at the two convents were drawn from some of the most influential noble families in France, with close connections between the Court and the Abbaye. The students were taught by professional musicians and actors, including actors from the Comédie-Française. In the 18th century, the convent even included a theatre, complete with costumes and scenery. (Reynes 1987, pp. 266-267).

La musique de Sa Majesté a excellé à son ordinaire pendant les jours de ténèbres... Nous avons eu aussi une très belle musique à Paris dans les mêmes jours, et l'on a couru en foule à la Sainte-Chapelle et à l'Abbaye-aux-Bois. Ce qu'on entendit à la Sainte-Chapelle, étoit de MM. Chaperon, la Lande, et Lalouette; et à l'Abbaye-aux-Bois, de M. Charpentier. (*Mercurie galant*, April 1680)

In her discussion of the music composed by Charpentier for the Tenebrae services at the Abbaye-au-Bois, Ranum (Ranum, P. *My reading of the evidence for 1680*.

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PRanum/evid1680.html>) writes that:

For our understanding of Charpentier as a composer it is therefore interesting to note that he chose to have the singers accompanied by instruments [for *Les neuf leçons de Ténèbres* (H. 96- 110) and the *Neuf répons de chaque jour* (H. 111-119)], rather than by the abbey organ, a "buffet d'orgue de 4 pieds de long sur 3 pieds et demy de large, posé dans un cabinet de bois de chesne, couvert de poirier noirç," with seven jeux in the upper keyboard and five in the lower.

In fact, the passages that Charpentier writes for instruments (H. 100a-c and H. 101) were almost certainly added to the manuscript at a later date. The style of clefs used is from a different period to the rest of the works. It therefore seems likely that at the original performance of these works Charpentier used the organ within the Abbaye to accompany the singers, but that the works were given a later performance at which instruments were used. There is only one work within this set of Tenebrae pieces that calls for an instrument in addition to the organ: H. 105 includes an obbligato part for treble viol and appears to have been written for the original performance.

Patricia Ranum has suggested that the motet, "Gaudete fideles" (H. 306) might have been written for the Port-Royal de Paris because its text is in honour of St Bernard, founder of the Cistercians. Ranum notes, however, that "the recorders make it highly unlikely that these pieces [H. 306 and H. 53] were performed by the Cistercian nuns of this abbey [of the Port-Royal], where Charpentier's sister was a converse nun" (Ranum, P. *French: 1670*. <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PRanum/Fr1670.html>)

While the austerity of the Port-Royal may have made it an inappropriate venue for a performance of a motet with recorders, it is possible that the motet was written for use at the Abbaye-au-Bois, at which

instruments were almost certainly used. The nuns of the Abbaye-au-Bois were also of the Cistercian Order and so a motet in honour of St Bernard would have been appropriate for the convent.

Montmartre

Ranum (Ranum, P. *My Reading of the Evidence: 1670*. <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PRanum/ev1670.html>) notes that in 1660, the Queen Mother described the singing at the Abbaye of Montmartre:

les voix harmonieuses des Dévotes Religieuses, lesquelles, d'un chant excellent, ont, ce dit-on, le beau talent: Leur muzique fut belle et bonne, mais ne faut pas qu'on s'en étonne, puisque ce Chantre renommé des Majestez tant estimé, que le sieur Veillot on appelle, étoit compositeur d'icelle; et pour montrer que ce Concert étoit d'un Maître très-expert, la Reine ne s'est pû défendre d'aller deux ou trois fois l'entendre, louant ledit Veillot toujours par de fort obligeans discours. Le Roy, la Reine son Epouse, avec des Seigneurs plus de douze, furent de mesme, expressément, jouir de ce contentement; et l'Abbesse, des mieux apprize, Soeur de M. le Duc de Guize, à la Reine parla si bien qu'elle aima fort son entretien, cette illustre Supérieure ayant grand Esprit."

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Endnotes

1. The appendix includes references to nuns singing during the Offices.
2. See, for example, the works of Nivers, Clérambault, and Charpentier.
3. For more information on the daily devotional routines of the Guise princesses, see Ranum, P. *Preface to: The "Regular" Life of Two Devout Princesses*.
4. There are references to nuns being subjected to flagellation or subjecting themselves to self-flagellation in an attempt to allow the soul (rather than body or will) to be in communion with God. (Reynes 1987, pp. 130-131).
5. For a history of Christian mysticism, see *Christian Mysticism* <http://home.earthlink.net/~livingflame/Mysticism.html>
6. "L'ordre des Saluts requiert que l'on chante un motet du Saint Sacrement, puis le verset et l'oraison, ensuite un motet de la Ste Vierge, avec le verset et l'oraison, enfin 'Domine salvum fac Regem,' et après le verset et l'oraison l'on donne la bénédiction un motet qui soit un peu court.... Quand on adjoute un motet d'un saint ou d'une sainte, à raison de sa feste, on le place entre la Ste Vierge et le Roy." (Nivers, "Observations," in *Motets à voix seule* (Paris, 1689). Cited in Kauffman 2001b, xv).
7. The *Meslanges autographes* is a collection of 28 volumes of music copied by Charpentier into two series of *cahiers*. It is now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (F Pn: Rés. Vm¹ 259), and is available as a facsimile edition (Charpentier, Marc-Antoine. (1990-). *Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Oeuvres complètes, Meslanges autographes*. Paris: Minkoff)
8. For a discussion of the music written for Saint-Cyr, see Kauffman, D. (2001). Performance traditions and motet composition at the convent school at Saint-Cyr. *Early Music*, 29, 235-249.
9. Couperin also composed motets for his daughter, the singer, Marguerite-Louise Couperin for use at the Royal Chapel in Versailles. (Beaussant 1990, p. 105). These motets are virtuosic pieces, ideally suited to the voice of Marguerite-Louis Couperin.
10. Charpentier was employed by the Guise princesses during the 1670s and 1680s. By the time of Mlle de Guise's death in 1688, Charpentier had already left the service of the Hôtel de Guise and was employed by the Jesuits at the Church of St Louis in the rue St Antoine. In 1698, he was appointed as Maître de Musique at the Sainte-Chapelle.
11. See the appendix for references to the Port-Royal from the early 18th century.
12. See the appendix for references to the Abbaye-au-Bois.
13. For more details, see Ranum, P. 1675: *Madame de Toscane comes to Paris and Charpentier begins writing Oratorios* <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PRanum/tosc75.html>
14. Jacques Edouard refers to the *Quatuor Anni Tempestates* (H. 335-338) as a "dialogue" rather than a motet. Edouard, J. (1726) *Mémoire des ouvrages de musique latine et françoise de défunt Mr Charpentier*. Paris.
15. Charpentier includes the words "à l'heure qu'on leve l'hostie"
16. In Clérambault's collection of *Motets à une et deux voix* (Paris, after 1733), the composer notes that the motets should be performed "with the accompaniment of the organ, as is done at Saint-Cyr," but that the organ "can be dispensed with, since the lower singing voices always have the true bass" (Kauffman 2001b, xiii).

17. In some motets, such as "O clementissime" (H. 256), the continuo doubles the third voice, even when the voice lies above the other voices, leading to some interesting harmonic writing.
18. H. 374, which is scored for two sopranos, 2 recorders and continuo, is located in F Pn: Rés. Vmc. Ms. 27, and H. 342, which is scored for three sopranos and continuo, is located in *cahier* [49] of the *Meslanges autographes*, as well as in F Pn: Vm¹ 1269, a collection of motets compiled by Brossard. H. 342 can be found on pages 2-5 of volume 8 of Charpentier, Marc-Antoine. (1990-). *Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Oeuvres complètes, Meslanges autographes*. Paris: Minkoff.
19. St Theresa was the source of special devotion in France, particularly by Queen Marie-Thérèse. For more information, see Ranum, P. *Preface to: The "Regular" Life of Two Devout Princesses*
20. See the appendix for more references to the Carmelite convent. Mlle de Guise is known to have owned a book on the life of St Theresa in her library at the Hôtel de Guise. For more information, see Ranum, P. *Preface to: The "Regular" Life of Two Devout Princesses* <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PRanum/regular.html>
21. For more information about the contents of the apartment see Ranum, P. *Preface to: The "Regular" Life of Two Devout Princesses* <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PRanum/regular.html>
22. Charpentier spent time in Italy during the late 1660s. One wonders if he visited Santa Maria della Vittoria to admire Bernini's sculpture during his stay.
23. La Tour, *The Repentant Magdalen*; La Tour, *Magdalen of Night Light*; La Tour, *The Penitent Magdalen*; Champaigne, *The Penitent Magdalen*; and Vouet, *Mary Magdalen Repentant*.
24. All but one of the paintings of Mary Magdalene listed in footnote 21 include a skull presenting the transiency of life.
25. *Magdalena lugens voce sola cum symphonia* (H. 343) is located in *cahier* [49] of the *Meslanges autographes*. It can be found on pages 5-9 of volume 8 of Charpentier, Marc-Antoine. (1990-). *Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Oeuvres complètes, Meslanges autographes*. Paris: Minkoff. It is also found in F- Pn: Vm¹ 1939. "Sola vivebat in antris Magdalena lugens" (H. 373) and (H. 388) are settings of the same text as H. 343.
26. Beside the title are written the words "bon a executer" and indeed this is a superb piece of music.