

The *Airs de différent auteurs avec la tablature de luth*, a collection of solo *airs de cour* for solo voice with lute accompaniment, were first published in fifteen volumes by Ballard between 1608 and 1632. The *airs de cour* consist of secular, strophic court songs dealing mostly with topics of love and represent some of the most important vocal works to come from France during this period. Written by the finest court poets and composers of their time, entertained nobles and their courtiers with their simple and lyrical nature. The popularity of the *airs* led to several publications for a variety of ensemble forces, including those for solo voice and lute. In fact, the *Airs de différent auteurs avec la tablature de luth* were so popular that Ballard issued a second printing to meet the demand. The *airs* represent the cultural tastes of the Parisian nobility and elite during the early seventeenth century.

### **History and Development**

The *airs de cour* were originally composed for four or five voices, although settings for up to eight voices exist. The poetry for the *airs* grew out of Jean Antoine Baïf's development of *musique mesurée*. During the last part of the sixteenth-century, a group of poets called the *Pléiade*, made up of Baïf and others, applied the quantitative principles of classical Greek and Latin to French poetry by matching long notes with long syllables and short notes with short syllables.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the somewhat unconventional approach to treating the French language, by 1570 Baïf gained enough support from his colleagues to found the *Académie de Poésie et Musique*, providing a setting for composers and poets to study and propagate *musique mesurée*. Baïf intended to give performances of *musique*

---

<sup>1</sup> "Musique mesurée," *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don M. Randel (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP: 1986) 523.

*mesurée* in order to revive the ethical effects of ancient music while influencing a small circle of intellectuals and politicians. Although Baïf's plans to impose this new art to the general public never came to fruition, the influence of *musique mesurée* was seen in French music throughout the remainder of the sixteenth and middle of the seventeenth centuries and most certainly the *airs*.

The general character of the *airs* was a light-hearted and pleasing one, hardly taxing the noble ear. In the preface of his 1571 publication of, *Livre d'airs de cour miz sur le luth*, Adrian Le Roy states that he was presenting a light, simple song previously known as *voix de ville* (vaudeville).<sup>2</sup> While the *airs de cour* were primarily written and performed in courts, they were also cultivated in many private salons as well. Margaret Seares suggests that certain political events moved the development of genres such as the *airs* away from the courts and to other locations. She sites the murder of the Duc de Luynes, a humanist and leading cultural figure, in 1621 as one of the events that prompted the shift of artistic activity from the court to the salons.<sup>3</sup> The salons apparently had their own motives for controlling the type of art created in France. Many individuals, like Baïf and his *Académie*, sought to use music as a way of unifying and directing Parisian cultural life. Drawing from topics of courtly love and working from Baïf's models, the *airs* show influence from both the court and the private salon.

---

<sup>2</sup> John H. Baron, "Air de cour," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan Press, 1980) 183.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Seares, "Etienne Moulinié and the *Air de Cour* (1624 - 1635)," *Studies in Music* 19 (1985): 61 - 79.

Setting music to poetry according to Baif's principles obscured any sense of regular musical meter such that the music was notated without barlines, except at the ends of lines or sections. The lack of meters and barlines reflect the extreme flexibility of the *airs*, showing great sensitivity to setting the vocal parts. Although a meter was rarely specified in the *airs*, sometimes a triple or duple meter can often be superimposed on the music. However, the superimposed meter does not necessarily represent the declamation of the text. Often, an *air* will shift from triple to duple meter within the same stanza, illustrating the rhythmic freedom of the text. In fact, the *airs* tend to fall into two rhythmic categories: those that fall into metrical patterns and those that feel completely free.<sup>4</sup> These classifications are very flexibility and in no way dictate or affect the way in which one performs an *air*. Since the composers of the *airs* emphasized rhythmic qualities of the text, a homophonic texture provided the best means for setting the text. The text was set syllabically with occasional melismas spanning only a few notes. The *airs* had a narrow melodic range, rarely exceeding an octave, and the harmony of the *airs* was simple with strong tonal tendencies.

### **Main Composers**

The principle composers of the *airs* worked primarily in the French courts. Of the many composers, Pierre Guédron (c1575 - c1620) stands out as one of the finest because of his natural setting of text and expressive melodies. While the constraints of *musique mesurée* might have intimidated other composers, Guédron tackled the problem with a sense of

---

<sup>4</sup> Don P. Walker, "The Influence of *Musique Mesurée à L'Antique*, Particularly on the *Airs de Cour* of the Early Seventeenth Century," *Musica Disciplina* 2 (1948): 141 - 163.

elegance and sophistication that is captured in his *airs*.<sup>5</sup> Guédron received his music education at an early age and in 1601 went to work for Henry IV. Under Henry IV, Guédron served many posts including *maître des enfants de musique*. He maintained his positions until 1613, when he handed them down to his son-in-law, Antoine Boësset, another highly respected composer and contributor to the *airs de cour*. Boësset (1585 - 1643) maintained his posts until his death. His compositions were highly regarded and he was considered a master of the *airs*. In his *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter*, Bacilly praises Boësset: “Everyone agrees that the late Boësset laid down the first foundations of *airs* and that he had the honor of having composed beautiful songs.”<sup>6</sup> Other principle composers of *airs* were Baïf, Etienne Moulinié, François Richard, and Gabriel Bataille, who was responsible for compiling and arranging the *airs* for solo voice and lute.

Bataille (c1575 - 1630) also worked in the courts and was close friends with Ballard, who helped him launch his career. Bataille’s arrangements show great care in not only preserving the original melody, but also creating an unobtrusive lute part. Bataille’s lute parts exhibit the broken-chord style, or the *style-brisé*, which provides a transparent, yet harmonically stable foundation for the *airs*. The lute part provided a tonal-like harmony for the simple *air* melodies. Like the vocal *airs*, Bataille rarely includes bar lines or time signatures in his arrangements. Bataille does not specify the lute key, but he does indicate the

---

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the French *musique mesurée*, Bacilly states: “The French, whose strictness (which is perhaps excessive) tends to hold composers in check and often prevents them from doing everything which their genius would inspire.” Béningne de Bacilly, *A Commentary upon The Art of Proper Singing (Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter 1668)*, trans. and ed. by Austin Caswell, *Musical Theorists in Translation 7* (New York: The Institute of Medieval Music, 1968) 42

<sup>6</sup> Bacilly, 61.

first note of the vocal part in the lute tablature, which suggests a lute in A. However, the same method also reveals that several *airs* were written for a lute in G. In performance situations this does not present a problem since one can easily transpose the vocal part.

### **Repertory**

There are a total of fifteen volumes of *airs* for solo voice and lute, all of which were published by Ballard. Bataille took on the task of preparing the first six volumes with Ballard's help between 1608 - 1615. The remaining nine volumes were prepared and managed by Boësset and were printed between 1615 - 1632. Both composers selected and arranged the music in these publications as well as including their own work. Apparently, the high number of sales from the first publication prompted a second printing of all the materials. The design of the books were well thought out, each air occupying facing pages, eliminating the need for page turns. The careful planning and attention to detail makes these publications very reliable. At least one copy of each volume survives in its original form as well as a small number of manuscripts. The printed and manuscript sources are listed below:

#### **Printed Sources:**

1608<sup>10</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille*. Paris, P. Ballard, 1608.

1609<sup>13</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille. Second livre*. Paris, P. Ballard, 1609.

1610<sup>20</sup> *A musical Banquet, furnished with varietie of delicious ayres*. London, printed for T. Adams, 1610.

1611<sup>10</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille. Troisième livre*. Paris, P. Ballard, 1611.

- 1612<sup>7</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1612.
- 1613<sup>9</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille. Quatriesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1613.
- 1614<sup>8</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille. Second livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1614.
- 1614<sup>9</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille. Troisesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1611.
- 1614<sup>10</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille. Cinquiesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1611.
- 1615<sup>11</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille. Sixiesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1615.
- 1615<sup>12</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1615.
- 1617<sup>8</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par Gabriel Bataille. Septiesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1617.
- 1618<sup>9</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par eux mesmes. Huictiesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1618.
- 1619<sup>9</sup> *La pieuse aloutte avec son tirelire. Partie première.* Valenciennes, J. Vervliet, 1619.
- 1620<sup>11</sup> *Airs de cour mis en tablature de luth par Anthoyne Boesset. Neufiesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1620.
- Boesset, Antoine. *Airs de cour en tablature de luth de Anthoyne Boesset. Dixiesme livre.* (Paris, P. Ballard, 1621).
- Boyer, Jean. *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par luy mesme.* (Paris, P. Ballard, 1621.)
- 1621<sup>9</sup> *La pieuse aloutte avec son tirelire. Partie seconde.* Valenciennes, J. Vervliet, 1621.
- 1622<sup>9</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs, mis en tablature de luth par eux mesmes. Septiesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1622.

1623<sup>6</sup> *Airs de différents auteurs avec la tablature. Unziesme livre.* Paris, P. Ballard, 1623.

Boesset, Antoine. *Airs de cour en tablature de luth de Anthoyne Boesset. Douziesme livre.*  
(Paris, P. Ballard, 1624).

1626<sup>12</sup> *Airs de cour avec la tablature de luth de Anthoyne Boesset. Treziesme livre.* Paris, P.  
Ballard, 1626.

1628<sup>11</sup> *Airs de cour avec la tablature de luth de Anthoyne Boesset. Quatroziesme livre.*  
Paris, P. Ballard, 1628.

1629<sup>11</sup> *French court aires, with their ditties englished.* London, W. Stansby, 1629.

1631<sup>6</sup> *Tablature de luth de differens auteurs, sur les accords nouveaux.* Paris, P. Ballard,  
1631.

1632<sup>7</sup> *Airs de cour avec la tablature de luth de Anthoyne Boesset. Quinziesme livre.* Paris,  
P. Ballard, 1632.

1638<sup>7</sup> *Tablature de luth de differens auteurs, sur les accords nouveaux.* Paris, P. Ballard,  
1638.

Boesset, Antoine. *Airs de cour en tablature de luth de Anthoyne Boesset. Seiziesme livre.*  
(Paris, P. Ballard, 1643).

### **Manuscripts:**

Kremsmünster, Benediktinerstift. Ms. L. 64. Italian tablature containing works for voice and lute. Composers include Bataille, Boësset, Guédron, and Roy. ca. 1610 - 1620.

FPn: Rés. Vmf ms. 48. French tablature containing several works for solo lute and voice with lute. Approximately 10 works labeled as *airs* with French titles. Composers are not listed. ca. 1643 - 1648.

US: Wc, Ms. M. 2. 1. T2. 17D. Case. Lautentabulatur. Aquisitions - Nr. 411291/31 and 665736. Collection of lute music in French lute tablature (6 and 5 lines), French guitar tablature (6 and 5 lines), and alfabeto. Includes airs by Boesset, Lambert, and Ballard. ca. 1660 - 1670.

FPn: Fonds Conservatoire National Rés. 823. Eingang-Nr.: 22342. Collection of lute music in French tablature containing anonymous French airs and chansons. The manuscript dates from 1690.

DKI: Ms. 4° Mus. 108 I. Lute music in French and Italian tablature. Approximately 4 - 5 *airs* with French titles. Composers are not listed. Date of manuscript is unknown.

### **Performance Practice**

Performing the *airs de cour* present a challenge for the modern performer. Part of the challenge lies in trying to understand the phrasing and shape of the music. Modern performers depend strongly on barlines to guide them through a piece, something which the *airs* lack. The melody and rhythm of the *airs* are quite easy to transcribe because the parts are notated clearly. The difficulty lies in interpreting the music in performance since the phrasing is unclear as well as some of the text setting in the melody. The rhythmic system proposed by Baïf does not often follow the stresses in the French language that one is accustomed to; Baïf's system was even foreign to the people of his time. The flexibility of Baïf's system allows for many possibilities in performance.

Annie Cœurdevey proposes that part of the solution of how we should interpret the *airs* is found in the lute tablature. She states, "The melodic and rhythmic transcription of the tablature does not pose any problem...The difficulty begins when one tries to interpret the additional signs."<sup>7</sup> The signs that she refers to are the non-letter figures found in the tablature:

. Cœurdevey's research focuses with the two symbols that indicate holding a note or chord into the next beat:

One of her main points is that often the Verchaly edition<sup>8</sup> does not correctly indicate note durations which could easily

---

<sup>7</sup> Annie Cœurdevey, "Dynamique et phrasé dans les tablatures de luth des airs de cour (1608 - 1643), *Revue de Musicologie* 76 (1990) 226.

<sup>8</sup> André Verchaly, ed. *Airs de cour pour voix et luth. (1603 - 1643)* (Paris: Publications de la Société Française de Musicologie, 1961).



confuse the performer. From a lutenists perspective, sometimes it is impossible to hold a note or chord longer than a specified beat, regardless of the figure's instruction. The figures are significant for yet another reason. Cœurdevey points out that the figures tend to occur on a long syllable or a melisma.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the figures do more than signal a held note in the lute, but one in the voice part as well. Cœurdevey concludes that the figures help signal the phrasing and dynamics of the lute part by drawing attention to the held notes of the vocal part. She also points out that not all held notes have the lute figures, only the ones that signal the end of a phrase or line. In performance, these figures mark the otherwise unclear phrases.

This issue is critical when transcribing the lute parts. One intention might be to "idealize" the note durations when transcribing the lute parts to a treble/bass clef layout. This type of transcription distorts the true nature of the lute part, which must now provide musical direction as well as harmonic foundation. Cœurdevey's interpretation of the lute figures offers an insight to the performance of the *airs* that one must reflect in a transcription. However, lutenists playing from the tablature must also be aware of these subtleties since they correspond directly to the vocal part.

The vocal parts also present several issues. The desired voice quality for the *airs* is best summarized by Albert Cohen: "Writers of the time speak of the type of voice most suitable to the singing of airs--even and supple in quality, true in pitch, and moderate in dynamics. The singer was expected to phrase in accordance with the text, which had to be

---

<sup>9</sup> Cœurdevey, 230. Cœurdevey provides several tablature examples in her article to support this claim.

clearly enunciated. The end result was to charm the ear through a ‘sweetness’ of sound (la douceur française).”<sup>10</sup> The most important feature of the *airs* is the declamation of the text. The scarcity of barlines force the singer to decide on phrasing--even the lute part cannot dictate every phrase. Lutenists should consider the homophonic/polyphonic quality of the lute parts. Transcriptions can often alter the chordal quality of the lute accompaniments and notating the *style-brisé* in a convincing manner can be difficult. Since the texture of the vocal *airs* are nearly all homophonic, the lutenist should try to retain this character since Bataille did as well.

Tempo is left strictly to the discretion of the performer, “since it was governed more by an attitude than by a scheme of more-or-less fixed rates of speed.”<sup>11</sup> The singer should take liberty with the tempo and dwell on notes. Since the melodies are very simple and the text strophic, the singer should ornament repetitions of musical ideas, taking care not to obscure the texts or detract from the rhythmic quality of the music. When performing the *airs*, the singer has an enormous amount of control.

Ornamentation presents an entirely new set of problems for the modern performer. Since both the voice and lute parts are simple, both performers should take liberties and ornament their parts. However, the degree of ornamentation in the vocal part is unclear since *musique mesurée* puts great emphasis on the rhythm of the text. The lutenist must be careful not to overpower or confuse the singer when ornamenting. Whether or not traditional

---

<sup>10</sup> Albert Cohen, “A Study of Notational and Performance Problems of an Early *Air de cour: Je voudrais bien, ô Cloris* by Antoine Boësset,” *Notations and Editions: A Book in Honor of Louise Cuyler*, ed. Edith Borroff (Iowa: WM. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1974) 55.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, 58.

ornaments in French music of the time was allowed is not clear well. Singers should take special care when ornamenting the *airs*, paying particular attention to the phrasing and movement of the music.

Bacilly provides detailed descriptions of the types of ornaments permissible in the *airs*, of which the most significant will be mentioned. Bacilly stresses the importance of ornaments and how they can affect a performance: “Without any doubt a piece of music can be beautiful, but at the same time unpleasant. This is usually a result of the omission of necessary ornaments.”<sup>12</sup> Some of the ornaments mentioned by Bacilly include: *port de voix* (a rising portamento, not to be confused with an appoggiatura), *cadence* and *tremblement* (two types of vibrato or vocal inflection involving the throat), *accent* or *aspiration* (a short passing note), and *doublément du Gosier* (another ornament involving the throat). One unifying feature among all these ornaments is that they all involve long notes and syllables. Bacilly’s ornaments never concern short notes.

Bacilly advises that *cadences* and *tremblements* must be used with great care and sparingly: “On those which have next-to-last syllables which are long, a long *tremblement* can be used, if not at the final cadential point of an *air*, then at least other important cadential points.”<sup>13</sup> Final notes are very important to Bacilly when performing *airs* and his ornaments stress these notes, suggesting that the vocalist is important in leading the phrasing of the *airs* by ornamenting these points of arrival. The final note of the *air* is the most important note of all and must be treated carefully. Bacilly accuses singers of putting inappropriate stresses on

---

<sup>12</sup> Bacilly, 64.

<sup>13</sup> Bacilly, 86.

final notes which destroys the feeling of the piece. When a singer reaches a final note, he must “increase the volume of the voice up to a certain point and then to diminish it little by little so that the resulting effect is sort of a surge and ebb.”<sup>14</sup>

The key to performing the *airs* centers around understanding resting points in the music. Both Cœurdevey and Bacilly focus on cadence points as a way of marking sections and phrases. Therefore, it is possible that note durations at cadence points need not be taken literally. Instead, the singer can linger on a long syllable and note for a moment before moving on to the next line. The integration of *musique mesurée* allows for incredible flexibility and interpretation of the *airs*. The lack of barlines allows the performer to interpret the music without the restrictions of meter. In his entire treatise, Bacilly never mentions or discusses meter or rhythm. His only concern is the proper singing, which leads to an expressive delivery of the text.

### **Transcription Policy**

All transcription presented in this paper were transcribed from the Minkoff reprints of the *Airs de différent auteurs avec la tablature de luth*. Every attempt was made to preserve the original presentation of the music as well as assisting modern performers. Editorial barlines are dashed while original barlines are presented as solid lines. Editorial barlines represent groupings to assist in rehearsing the music but do not represent the actual rhythmic interpretation of the music. In songs that do not indicate a meter, barlines are added for grouping purposes as well. The finals of each piece are reduced to whole notes but need not be interpreted as such. Repeat signs indicated by the publication by a sign are reproduced in

---

<sup>14</sup> Bacilly, 100.

modern notation as well as first and second endings. Bataille's "Amour victorieux", the tablature suggests a lute in G and was transcribed as such. In Bataille's "Que de peines" and Boësset's "Que d'espines", the repeats were modified for clarity purposes.

The *airs de cour* represent a large portion of French secular music. The fifteen volumes arranged by Bataille for voice and lute only represent a fraction of the *airs* written between 1571 and 1650. They represent a significant poetic and musical movement that shaped French music and gave it a distinct identity. Composers of the *airs* concentrated on expressing the new poetic ideals of Baïf and his followers. The music provided a pleasing medium in which the text could be presented and expressed. Bataille's arrangement allow a small force of musicians to perform a significant number of *airs* with little difficulty. The long history and large number of publications and arrangements clearly show that the *airs de cour* was more than a passing fad.