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PREVIEW

MICHEL BLAVET'S
FLUTE SONATAS, OP. 3:
AN EDITION WITH COMMENTARY

By

Kristin Ann Heslop

A DISSERTATION

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

at the

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Professor John R. Bailey

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Michel Blavet's Flute Sonatas, Op. 3:

An Edition with Commentary

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MICHEL BLAVET'S FLUTE SONATAS, OP. 3

AN EDITION WITH COMMENTARY

Kristin Ann Heslop, DMA

University of Nebraska, 2005

Adviser: John R. Bailey

Michel Blavet (1700-1768) was the premier flutist in France in the first half of the eighteenth century. In addition to a performing career, Blavet also composed several works for flute, including his Opus II and Opus III collections of sonatas. The Opus II collection is readily available to the modern flutist in several modern print editions, but the Opus III collection has been virtually neglected by publishers and scholars. Only two editions of the Opus III collection are currently available: Danish edition published by Broekmanns en Von Poppel, and a French edition published by Billaudot. Additionally, scholarship on the Opus III collection is quite limited. This document creates a modern, scholarly edition of the Opus III collection, together with a study of its style and performance practice issues. This document is organized in two parts: Chapter I includes a discussion of Blavet's career and works; a discussion of the style of the Opus III collection in which each Opus III sonata is examined for evidence of *les goûts réunis* and a discussion of the performance practice issues involved. Additionally, Chapter I includes explicit information pertaining to the execution of these sonatas in a stylistic manner. Chapter II provides the performing edition of the sonatas themselves.

For Sylvia Boyd

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Michel Blavet (1700-1768) was the premier flutist in France in the first half of the eighteenth century. In addition to a performing career, Blavet also composed several works for flute, including his Opus II and Opus III collections of sonatas. The Opus II collection is readily available to the modern flutist in several modern print editions,¹ but the Opus III collection has been virtually neglected by publishers and scholars. Only two editions of the Opus III collection are currently available: Danish edition published by Broekmanns en Von Poppel, and a French edition published by Billaudot. Additionally, scholarship on the Opus III collection is quite limited. The goal of this document is to create a modern, scholarly edition of the Opus III collection, together with a study of its style and performance practice issues. This document will be organized in two parts. Chapter I includes a discussion of Blavet's career and works; a discussion of the style of the Opus III collection in which each sonata is examined for evidence of *les goûts réunis*; and a discussion of the performance practice issues involved including explicit help for the performer in executing the sonatas stylistically. Chapter II presents a performing edition of each sonata including a realization of the continuo part.

¹ Publishers include Amadeus, Bärenreiter, Boosey and Hawkes, Schirmer, Universal, Schott, and Huegel.

Major sources² related to this topic include the dissertation by Jane Meredith Bowers entitled *The French Flute School from 1700 to 1760*.³ This dissertation is a comprehensive study of the French flute school, including discussions of the instrument itself in this era, composers, performers, concerts, flute music and flute makers. Included in this dissertation is a discussion of Blavet's career, and some discussion of Blavet's works, including the Opus III sonatas.

Another valuable source is C.W. Coffee's document *The Sonatas for Flute of Michael Blavet*.⁴ Included in this document is a thorough discussion of Blavet's life and career, a discussion of Blavet's works, ornamentation, and a lecture recital. Coffee's analysis does not provide a detailed examination of each sonata, movement by movement, demonstrating the influence of either the French or Italianate style, nor does he include the scores of the works.

The Franz Vester edition of the Opus III sonatas⁵ provides good general commentary and some performance practice suggestions; however, this document will deal more with stylistic features and explicit performance practice issues and will include breathing places.

Another significant and applicable source is Betty Bang Mather's *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque: A Handbook for Performance*,⁶ which provides a comprehensive discussion and analysis of French baroque dances. This book has great pertinence to Blavet, as he composed during the era this work discusses. Many of Blavet's individual movements are either notated explicitly as dance movements, or demonstrate some dance

² Neil Zaslaw, "Michel Blavet," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, pp. 693-94. The article includes five paragraphs, in which the author summarizes Blavet's personal life, gives a brief synopsis of his career, briefly discusses Blavet's works for flute, and then discusses his theatrical compositions.

³ Jane Meredith Bowers, "The French Flute School from 1700-1760" (Ph. D. dissertation, The University of California, Berkeley, 1971).

⁴ Curtis Webb Coffee, "The Sonatas for Flute of Michel Blavet" (DMA document, Boston University, 1964).

⁵ Michel Blavet, *Troisième Livre de Sonates pour la Flûte traversière avec la Basse*, ed. Frans Vester (Amsterdam: Broekmans en Von Poppel BV, 1986).

⁶ Betty Bang Mather. *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque: A Handbook for Performance*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

influence. Mather's work has great application to these sonatas, and includes a discussion of dance rhythms, proportions, tempos, meter, articulation, and ornamentation, as well as providing detailed analysis of fifteen dance types of the French Baroque.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE

Part I

BLAVET'S CAREER AND WORKS

Recognized as the most famous flute virtuoso of his time, Michel Blavet's playing was praised by his contemporaries for tonal beauty and technical prowess.⁷ Blavet raised the level of flute in the eighteenth century to new heights of brilliance, and helped put the flute on an equal level with the violin. Members of the nobility went to great lengths to feature Blavet at private concerts or to hire him as their personal flute teacher. In fact, Blavet was held in such high esteem that Frederick the Great of Prussia offered him a position at his court, which Blavet declined. Quantz, who himself was eventually hired for that same position at the court of Frederick the Great, praised Blavet's playing for its pure tone and brilliant technique and called him "France's finest flutist." Hubert Le Blanc remarked in 1740 that Blavet's flute playing was "preferable to the best violin

⁷Despite Blavet's fame during his lifetime, limited biographical research exists. The best sources of information related to Blavet's life are the following previously cited works: Bowers, Coffee, and the *New Grove Dictionary*.

when it is a question of imitating the human voice.”⁸ The flute of the baroque era itself was beset with significant intonation problems for which the player had to compensate with embouchure positions and cross fingerings, and Blavet, by all accounts, had mastered these difficulties. His playing inspired works by other composers, even non-flutists, including Telemann, Quantz, Boismortier, and Leclair and his performances set new standards and contributed to the public’s view of the flute as a solo instrument.

Blavet was born in 1700 in Besançon, and in his youth he taught himself to play many instruments, eventually specializing in the flute and bassoon.⁹ As a flutist for M. le Duc de Lévis, Blavet moved to Paris in 1723 and worked there as a professional musician, performing for nobility including King Louis XV and the Prince of Carignan. Coffee writes that Blavet’s career advanced based on his playing rather than his being involved in the political intrigues of his day.¹⁰ In 1725, Anne Danican Philidor established the Concerts Spirituels, a series of concerts created to provide musical entertainment on days when the Paris Opera was closed for religious holy days. Consequently, opera excerpts were precluded from being played at the Concerts Spirituels and this provided a platform for instrumental compositions to be heard. In 1726, Blavet gave his first performance there, and eventually performed at the Concerts Spirituels more times than any other musician. In addition to performing his own works, Blavet also performed the works of other composers. Coffee writes that F.W. Marpurg praised “Blavet’s willingness to perform the music of other composers as exemplifying an artistic generosity not present in most virtuosic performers.”¹¹ In 1731, he performed at the Concerts with Jean Marie Le Clair, and in 1745, he and three other musicians performed a quartet by Telemann. Blavet also held the position of principal flutist at the Paris Opera.

⁸ Ruth Halle Rowen, *Early Chamber Music* (1949; reprint, New York, Da Capo Press, 1978), p. 67.

⁹ An interesting aside is that Blavet played the flute left handed, possibly the result of having taught himself how to play.

¹⁰ Coffee, p. 12.

¹¹ Coffee, p. 14.

As the most popular and most respected flutist in France, Blavet received many performing engagements from members of Parisian society. In 1732, he accepted a position with the Comte de Clermont, as the title page from the first printing of the Opus II Sonatas reads *ordinaire de la musique de la Chambre du Roi, et de S.A.S. Monseigneur le Comte de Clermont, Prince du sang* and these sonatas, in fact were dedicated to Clermont's mistress.

When compared with his contemporaries like Quantz and Telemann, Michael Blavet's compositional output is relatively small: six duets, twelve sonatas, a concerto, some miscellaneous works, and theater pieces, much of which are now lost. His musical style typifies the synthesis of French and Italian late baroque styles, described by François Couperin (1668-1733) as *les goûts réunis*. Blavet's sonatas feature many overt dance movements and movements with significant dance influence. An important and unusual feature of the Opus II sonatas is that Blavet was the first French composer to delineate breathing places. The Opus II sonatas feature charming subtitles such as "The Imp" and "The Tender Quarreling," and Blavet even goes as far as to dedicate certain movements to certain aristocratic women of prominent noble families of his day, such as La Lumague and La Boucot.

Although Michel de la Barre, in 1703, was the first French composer to print advice on embouchure, articulation, and ornamentation, Blavet was the first composer to specify breathing places in the printed score. In his 1732 printing of his Opus 2 sonatas, Blavet himself included a small paragraph describing his reasons for including his breathing notation. He writes,

I have always noticed in pupils a difficulty in taking breath at the right place, which makes them confound one phrase with the next, or interrupt a melody which should be played

in one breath. To avoid this confusion, I have decided to use the letter “h” [h=haleine or breath] to indicate where to breathe, especially in songlike pieces such as Rondeaux and other little character pieces where gracefulness depends on the order of the phrases and on the clarity and precision which come from breathing easily and in the right place.¹²

Perhaps Blavet’s words themselves point to a pedagogical or didactic impetus for the composition of this opus.

In addition to his works for flute, Michael Blavet wrote a variety of religious, theatrical, and instrumental works. four (lost) sacred work; four (lost) theatrical works; six collections of flute works; and one flute concerto.¹³

¹² Michel Blavet, *Six Sonatas for Flute and Basso Continuo* (Amadeus, 1983), cover.

¹³ Michel Blavet, *Troisième livre de sonates pour la flûte traversière avec la basse* (Facsimile Jean-Marc Fuzeau, Courlay), pp. 8-10. Capitalization retained from the source.

CHAPTER ONE

Part II

THE STYLE OF THE OPUS III SONATAS

Impact of *Les goûts réunis* Influence of Dance Music Stylistic Differences from Opus II

Except among barbarians there is not a single nation that does not have something in its music that is more pleasing to it than to other nations; but that which is individual to each is usually neither great enough, nor of enough importance to merit special attention. In recent times, however, there are two peoples in particular who have earned considerable esteem through their improvement of musical style; led by their natural proclivities, they have each taken different paths to achieve this goal. These two people are the Italians and the French. Other nations have given the greatest approbation to the styles of these two peoples, and have sought to imitate and adopt some aspects of the styles of either the one or the other.

--Johann Joachim Quantz, 1752
From *On Playing the Flute*¹

In the late baroque, both the Italians and the French expressed clearly defined national musical styles, with performers, composers, and critics taking sides. The French had an affinity for suites or collections of dances, while the Italians, on the other hand, were partial to sonata forms. French suites were generally long, from five or six movements, while the Italian sonatas were shorter, consisting only of three or four

¹Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, Tr. Edward R Reilly, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), p. 320.

movements. The order of movements in the French suite was variable and flexible, while the order of movements in an Italian sonata was generally fixed, such as the alternating fast and slow movements of the *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata consisting of four movements: slow - fast - slow - fast) and *sonata da camera* (chamber sonata consisting of a free movement followed by two to four dances). French melodies tended to be simple, with short, highly articulated phrases, and extensive and precise ornaments, or, as they called them, *agréments*. The Italian style, on the other hand, tended to be less embellished, but the melodic content itself would contain more florid and extensive passage work. French pieces often contained programmatic elements, which may include extra-musical associations, such as allusions to poetry, people, mythology, etc. The French were also aware of a work's emotion, color, and melodic content, while the Italians were interested in conveying energy and activity, including driving harmonic sequences, syncopations, large leaps, and arpeggios, quickly reiterated notes, and rapid passage work. And while the French were partial to woodwinds, the Italians preferred strings.²

The suite itself was so popular in late seventeenth century France that one scholar, Nancy Toff, has referred to it as a “national trademark.”³ But this trademark, the suite, was encroached upon by the Italian sonata, especially after 1700. In fact, early eighteenth century writer Sebastien de Brossard said, “all the composers of Paris... had at that time... the craze to compose sonatas *à la manière Italienne*.”⁴ And Corette wrote of the Parisian musical scene, “All concerts took on a different form; scenes and symphonies from opera were replaced by sonatas.”⁵

As the Italian influence in France increased, French sonatas began to reflect the increasing virtuosity of the players: there were longer sixteenth note runs and arpeggios,

²This information is derived from several sources, including Bowers, Coffee, Mather, and Nancy Toff, *The Flute Book: A Complete Guide for Students and Performers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³Toff, p. 194.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

faster and more florid passage work, and larger melodic intervals. Slow movements, too, became more vocal and melismatic.

François Couperin (1668-1733) was the first French composer to write instrumental music specifically labeled with the Italian title “sonata.” He held both the French and Italian musical traditions in very high esteem and felt strongly that both could exist in harmony together. Couperin was the first to compose in a new manner that integrated the French and Italian styles. He called the blending of these two styles *les goûts réunis*, a term that was used to express his ideal of combining the best traits of both national musical styles. In creating this new musical style, Couperin combined French melodies, mild chromaticism, and basic simplicity of design within the formal Italian sonata mold. From the Italian style he also drew such devices as extended harmonic sequences, driving, motoric rhythm and a melodic style that is more flowing and melismatic. His aesthetic desire was to create a new musical style by joining the best of both the French and Italian musical worlds, as exemplified by his *Apothéose de Lulli*, written in 1725.

And yet, while the Italian sonata was openly received by the French, it did not completely usurp the position of the French instrumental suite. Instead, composers of early eighteenth-century France used the Italian sonata as an inspiration. Consequently, the instrumental sonatas of early eighteenth-century France reflect aspects of both the French instrumental suite and the Italian sonata.

A significant feature differentiating the two styles was that many French composers’ goals were to write music with programmatic implications. To critics of that age, this was the single most important feature of a French musical work. Composers consistently strove to make the literary implications or expressive connotations of a piece clear. In fact this literary significance of a musical work was so crucial that it was the

standard to which instrumental compositions were held. When the Italian sonata found its way into France, many eighteenth-century French critics could not understand this new form and its absence of literary allusions. Influential German composer, author, and teacher, and player Johann Joachim Quantz was one of those who was critical of the Italian instrumental style. His list of grievances include:

1. Eccentricity and confused ideas
2. Infatuation with the “new”
3. No more moving melodies
4. Basses are “neither majestic nor melodious, and have no particular connection to the principal part.”
5. Middle parts are safe and unadventurous--simply dry
6. Solos avoid bass lines that have melodic interaction
7. Bass moves tediously, is inaudible, or “always drums upon the same note.”
8. Ignore proportions of the work.
9. Too many liberties in harmonic progression
10. They “do not intermingle the passions as is customary in vocal music.”
11. Italians have “altered the style of their predecessors in instrumental music, but they have not improved it.”⁶

But while conservative critics such as Quantz were confounded by the new sonata, Parisian audiences themselves were enamored by it, and found the opportunities for virtuosic display particularly exciting and intriguing. The Italian sonata provided a vehicle to display the virtuosity of the performer, and was so popular that, in fact, the eighteenth-century French Publication, the *Mercure gallant* wrote 1713: “... sonatas spring right out of the ground here; no musician arrives without a sonata or cantata in his

⁶ Quantz, p. 326.

pocket; there isn't a soul who doesn't want to compose his own set to be engraved and so outsmart the Italians on their own ground."”⁷ Perhaps this “outsmarting of the Italians” provided inspiration for Michel Blavet.

Michel Blavet's Opus II and Opus III sonatas reflect both the Italian and French musical styles--*les goûts réunis* of Couperin--but the earlier Opus II sonatas show a more distinctly French approach with limited Italian influence, while the Opus III sonatas provide a perfect example of *les goûts réunis*. What is derivative of the French suite in the Opus II sonatas is, first, that each sonata is longer, consisting of five to six movements, including many overtly named dance movements. Blavet also includes subtitles, with some having programmatic implications, reminiscent of Couperin's works. Blavet actually entitled the Opus II collection as *Sonatas Mingled or Interspersed with Pieces*, not simply *Sonatas*. But what is Italian about the Opus II collection is the limited use of ornamentation, the use of Italian tempo markings, and the use of Italian terms for the dance movements. Many of the individual movements are specifically notated by Blavet with Italian dance designations, including allemandas, gavottas, sarabandas, a giga, and a siciliana. With these Opus II sonatas, Blavet subtitles certain movements with descriptive, dedicatory titles (an exclusively French practice), including *La Lumague*, *La Bouquet*, *Les tendres badinage*, and *L'Invincible*. Regarding the subtitles themselves, Coffee addresses the issue with this simple sentence: “Blavet used psychological indications for some movements, while attributing expressive or picturesque titles to others.”⁸ Obviously, a serious lack of scholarly research exists regarding these names. Many of the names themselves are French family surnames, and the use of the French feminine pronoun indicates that these are the names of women, not

⁷As quoted in William S. Newman, *The Sonata in the Baroque Era* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1959), p. 353.

⁸Coffee, p.19.

men. But we do not know who these women were, or what they meant to Blavet.

The Opus III collection of sonatas exhibit a delightful and imaginative unification of the French and Italian styles. Following is a discussion of each sonata, movement by movement. This work will show aspects of both the Italian and the French styles, *les goûts réunis*, that have variously informed each sonata. Each sonata is created with no one particular formula; instead Blavet invents a variety of schemes to create musical hybrids; his compositional approach varies from sonata to sonata and even from movement to movement, making use of inventive, creative compositional techniques, which may not be evident at first glance.

SONATA I in G Major

SONATA I

Movement I

Andante

The first movement this sonata is labeled *Andante*, has a “decidedly French flavor,” and “rhythmically resembles a sarabande”⁹ The characteristic rhythmic features of a sarabande include an accented dotted note on the second beat, omission of an upbeat, and a cadence on the third beat.¹⁰ This movement doesn’t consistently follow the typical sarabande pattern; for instance, it, in fact, does start with an upbeat, and lacks the short-long rhythmic pattern. Not until the last half of each section does this movement consistently reveal the rhythmic nature of a sarabande. Another dances suggested by the rhythmic features of this movement could be the loure, as a loure does have pickup and rhythmic patterns similar to the opening bars of the sonata. And a few loures have the meter signature 3 and contain three quarter note pulses, as this movement does.

This movement’s melody itself is simple and song-like, with a flowing lyricism that seems to be vocally inspired. This movement is homophonic, with the bass

⁹ Coffee, p. 66.

¹⁰*The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, s.v. “Sarabande.”

providing harmonic support with consistently “walking” eighth notes which are subordinate to the more sustained melody.

SONATA I

Movement II

Allegro

The second movement of Sonata I in G major, is homophonic, and is in binary form, with a meter signature of 2/4. Its beginning phrase opens with steady eighth notes, and the second phrase becomes somewhat more rhythmically complicated. The bass line is simple and supportive, almost exclusively comprised of quarters and eighths--only in the drive to the last phrase is there a single bar of descending sixteenth notes in the bass.

This movement exhibits many characteristics of the galant style: the melody is simple, free of complex counterpoint, is natural and easy to understand, and the simple harmony does not stray far afield. The phrase lengths, however remain irregular.

The influence of the bourree can be seen in this movement, with the meter signature of 2/4 (typical of early eighteenth century French bourrées), the upbeat pulse, and the initial grouping of four eighth note pulses.¹¹

SONATA I

Movement III

Aria I, Aria II

Paying homage to the French suite, Blavet's third movement of Sonata I is a pair of arias: one in G major, and the other in the parallel minor. Both are homophonic in texture and follow expected the rondeaux form ABACA (notated by various da capo and repeat signs), accompanied by steady eighth notes uninvolved in the melodic action, simply providing rhythmic and harmonic support. In the second aria, the accompanying figures do become somewhat more imitative, more participatory in the melodic action, and Blavet creates an alternating dialogue of eighth notes.

Also of note is that Aria II's key signature, although it is in the key of G minor, contains one flat, and not two. This was a common form of key notation in the

¹¹Mather and Karns, p. 216.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it is interesting to note that Blavet uses this key signature scheme in flat minor keys, specifically G minor and D minor.

SONATA I

Movement IV

Giga: Allegro assai

According to Mather, French and Italian giges exhibit different characteristics. French giges were characterized by ternary dotted rhythms, binary and rondeau forms, metrical signatures of 3 or 6/4, and “imitation between voices at the start of a musical period or reprise is common.”¹² Appearing in late seventeenth-century Italy, giga, on the other hand, appeared in the late seventeenth century in Italy, were based on an earlier English form, were homophonic in texture, and violinistic in character, displaying sections of fairly continuous quick notes. Early eighteenth-century Italian giga became popular in France, and exhibited meter signatures of 3/4, 3/8, 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8,

As this movement is entitled *Giga: Allegro assai*, Blavet explicitly labels this movement with the Italian version of the name. This movement is in the expected compound meter and sequential, continuous running figures of an Italian giga (lacking the dotted rhythms of a French gigue), but Blavet also retains a certain French flavor with the imitative dialogue between the continuo and the flute.

German musician Mattheson said that examples in the Italian style, “being not for dancing, but for fiddling, force themselves to extreme speed and volatility.”¹³ Perhaps this is consistent with Blavet’s flute playing: his virtuosic technique impacts his compositional style.

¹² Mather and Karns, p. 256.

¹³ Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, Hamburg, 1739. Facsimile, edited by Margarete Reimann, Kassel: Barenreiter, 1954. English translation in Ernest C. Harris, Johann Mattheson’s “*Der vollkommene Capellmeister*”: *A Revised Translation with Critical Commentary* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), II, chapter 13, paragraph 102.

SONATA II in B Minor

SONATA II

Movement I

Andante et spicato

The first movement of Sonata II, *Andante et spicato*, is a through-composed prelude that reveals a thoroughly French influence. Its melody is pointed and angular, something one does not generally find to this degree in Italian sonatas. Pervasive through the whole movement is much imitation and trading off of gestures with the flute and bass, as the bass shares in the characteristic motifs, often in imitation of the flute. While the other two movements of this sonata are homophonic in texture, with melodic interest predominantly in the treble part, “the *Andante e spicato* in Sonata II has jagged, vigorously dotted and an abundance of dissonant appoggiaturas, displaying a dramatic new quality to Blavet’s work.”¹⁴

Taking note of the term *spicato*, this term certainly points to the manner in which he expected this movement to be played--with a pointed, accented, crisp articulation in imitation of the *spicato* string playing technique.

Also of note is Blavet’s use of the key of B minor, a key generally associated with the exciting, dramatic and haunting effect, which is put to good use in this movement, with its dramatic, haunting chromaticism and its crisp, angular, pointed, jagged, dissonant melody.

SONATA II

Movement II

Allegro

With the meter signature in 2/4, and the little four bar phrases, this movement would suggest the dance influence of a *bourée*. The flute part is comprised of dramatic and virtuosic figuration, Italianate leaps and extensive sixteenth-note passages, bearing more resemblance to a string sonata and less resemblance to a wind sonata.

With this second movement, Blavet evokes the Italian style. The form is rounded

¹⁴Bowers, pp. 243-44.