

## INTRODUCTION

Jean-Philippe Rameau's first published collection of harpsichord works, the *Premier livre des Pièces de clavecin*, appeared in 1706.

The volume contains a single sequence of pieces in A, grouped as a suite, but not so identified. In style, the music resembles harpsichord works by such composers as Louis Marchand and Gaspard Le Roux, who had published similar collections in 1699 and 1705 respectively.

The plates were engraved by Claude Roussel, from whose address "au bout de la ruë de la Parchemunerie du côté de ruë de la Harpe" copies were sold. Copies were sold also by Henri Foucault, at his shop in the Rue St. Honoré, and by the composer, at his home in the "Vielle Ruë du Temple." If Rameau followed the practice of other composers of the period who sold printed copies of their works, he must have acted as the publisher of this collection, supplying funds for engraving, printing, and paper, and retaining ownership of the plates. The music plates, unaltered, were used for at least one later printing of the collection, issued in 1741 and bearing the imprint of Jean-Baptiste-Christophe Ballard, the publisher of Rameau's *Traité de l'harmonie* (1722) and *Nouveau Système de musique théorique* (1726). It is possible, however, that there were other issues as well.

It is interesting that this work could continue to find a market over a period of 35 years. To be sure, in 1706 Rameau was still relatively unknown (the title page describes him as "organiste des RR.PP. Jésuites de la Ruë St.-Jacques et des RR.PP. de la Mercy"); by 1741—when such pieces would have seemed quite old-fashioned—he was acknowledged as the leading French composer of his day. In fact, we may surmise that the collection was never especially popular, since it survives today in only a single copy of each issue; no other contemporary print of a Rameau work survives in nearly so few copies. Even the industrious Rameauphile Jean-Jacques-Marie Decroix<sup>1</sup> appears to have been unaware of the existence of this volume: his biography of Rameau in the *Biographie universelle* of François Michaud<sup>2</sup> does not list the *Premier livre*, nor does his comprehensive collection of copies of Rameau's works include any of its music.

<sup>1</sup>On Decroix's collection, see R. Peter Wolf, "An Eighteenth-Century *œuvres complètes* of Rameau," *Actes, Colloque international de musicologie organisé par la Société Jean-Philippe Rameau à l'occasion du tricentenaire de la naissance du compositeur, Dijon, 21-24 septembre 1983*, ed. Jérôme de La Gorce (Genève: Éditions Champion-Slatkine, 1986), pp. 159–169.

<sup>2</sup>*Biographie universelle*, ed. François Michaud (popularly known simply by the name of its editor), 52 vols. (Paris, 1811–28); the biography of Rameau appears in volume XXXIII, pp. 28–35.

*Prélude*

The musical score is written on ten staves, organized into five systems of two staves each. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, accidentals (sharps, naturals), and dynamic markings (p, f). The piece begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first system includes the title "Prélude" written in a cursive hand. The notation is dense and expressive, with many slurs and ties. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a final chord in the bass staff.