ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Playing Rameau on the Piano: The Suite in A minor from Nouvelles suite de pieces de clavecin

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While the keyboard music of J. S. Bach, Handel, and Domenico Scarlatti draws the attention of modern pianists, that of their French contemporary Jean-Philippe Rameau is rarely heard today. I believe that upon properly understanding the performance practices of Rameau’s day, as well as piano and harpsichord playing, some of his harpsichord works successfully can be adapted for the piano. My study discussed Rameau’s Suite in A minor from the Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin (1726/7) and included audio excerpts of this work. In contrast to the Baroque keyboard repertoire most familiar to many pianists, Rameau uses hooks and other symbols to indicate ornaments. His music most definitely is played with notes inégaux, a rhythmic alternation of notes that are written as equal length and used almost exclusively in French music. In addition to dance movements, Rameau includes a number of character pieces in the A-minor suite. When the piece is played on the piano, adjustments need to be made accordingly with pedals, touch, articulation, and dynamics. Pianists should remember to utilize the capacities of the piano while maintaining the integrity of the work within the composer’s intentions. In my study of the A-minor suite, I included performance suggestions for pianists.