

The Virgin and Saint Cecilia: Music and the Confraternal *Puys* of Rouen

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Music played a significant role in the confraternal culture of Rouen, in particular as part of the *puys*, the confraternal contests which were common in north-western France.¹ The most famous such *puy* in Rouen was the poetry contest held every year, beginning in 1486, by the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. On the first Sunday after the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 December), poems in praise of the Virgin were read to the assembled audience in the confraternity's chapel, and prizes were awarded for the best ones.²

The musical influence in this contest began with the fact that the types of poems that were required—the *chant royale*, *ballade* and *rondeau*—were based on musical forms, and the poets often described themselves as singing (*chanter*) the praises of the Virgin. The musical influence assumed a more concrete form in the plays in honour of the Virgin performed after the confraternity's post-contest banquet. Three of these plays survive, and music plays a significant role in two of them. In Guillaume Tasserie's *Le triomphe des Normands*, probably performed in 1499, there are two musical interludes that include both instrumental and sung music. They are strategically placed: one occurs just before the entrance of the villain, the other is part of the conclusion to the play. Both interludes celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. As well, the presence of singers and minstrels emphasizes the splendour of the court of the hero, Duke William the Conqueror of Normandy.³ In 1544, the play performed after the banquet was called a *chorale* and was made up of sung sections alternating with dialogue, all in praise of the Virgin.⁴ Even in the surviving play that does not have a musical section, musical imagery is used to describe the Virgin. She says:

Mais j'ay chanté par temperence,
Avec Dieu accordant mon son,
Que j'ay sans quelque dissonance
L'homme et Dieu mis en unisson.⁵

1 See Gérard Gros, *Le poète, la Vierge et le Prince du puy: études sur les puys marials de la France du Nord du XIVe siècle à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1992).

2 For details about the confraternity, see Dylan Reid, "Moderate Devotion, Mediocre Poetry and Magnificent Food: The Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of Rouen", *Confraternitas* 7.1 (1996): 3–10.

3 Guillaume Tasserie, *Le triomphe des Normands, suivi de La dame à l'agneau par G. Thibault*, ed. Paul le Verdier (Rouen, 1908), pp. 9, 70.

4 Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen (BMR) MS. Y 17 (*Recueil* of 1544 *Puy*), *Chorale qui fut soné[?] en la feste de la conception aud[ict] Rouen ... Ou sont introduicts dix personnages cest assavoir Sapience divine Ignorance La Vierge et les sept arts liberaulx*.

5 Guillaume Thibault, *La dame à l'agneau*, in Tasserie, *Triomphe des Normands*, p. 91.

The purpose of the music in the *puy* was not solely to praise the Virgin. It was also a means of enhancing the magnificence of the event, and, by consequence, underlining the importance of the sponsor of the event, the head of the confraternity for that year, who was called the “Prince”.⁶ The Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception was one of the most prestigious in the city, and its Princes were men of wealth and status. Their sponsorship of the *puy* was a way of enhancing this status. Hiring musicians to sing as part of a play furthered this goal by adding to the lustre of the event. This lustre was also enhanced by hiring trumpets to announce the previous and present winners of the poetry contest, and otherwise punctuate important moments during the day. Trumpets were thought to add flair and spectacle to the event, so much so that when the confraternity revised its statutes in 1614, the provision of trumpets was specifically included as part of the Prince’s duties.⁷ When in 1636 a dour Prince refused to pay for the trumpets, his parsimony provoked bitter complaints from the audience.⁸ Finally, Princes who wished to organize a memorable event made sure they included music during the banquet. In 1546, there was music before each of the three courses: first flutes, then trumpets, clarions and flutes, and finally singers accompanied by lyres.⁹ In the *puy* of the Immaculate Conception, the purpose of music ranged from the noble aim of praising the Virgin to the more venal one of conspicuous consumption.

In the sixteenth century, music moved from being an adornment of a *puy* to acquiring a *puy* of its own. The Confraternity of Saint Cecilia, in existence from at least the early sixteenth century, was the pious association that served the musicians of Rouen. Sometime in the middle of the century, inspired by the example of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, the members of the Confraternity of Saint Cecilia established a *puy* of their own, dedicated to music.¹⁰ It followed the model of the older, poetic *puy*.

The *puy* of Saint Cecilia was also a public contest held once a year (on the Sunday after the feast of Saint Cecilia, 22 November), and presided over by the confraternity’s Prince. Prizes were awarded for specific forms: a French *chanson* and a Latin *motet*. As with the poetic *puy*, posters were used to advertise the contest in

6 Princes were selected by their seniority as members of the confraternity.

7 *Le puy de la conception de Notre Dame, fondé au couvent des Carmes à Rouen. Son origine, erection, statuts & confirmation* [Rouen, 1614], pp. 42, 58.

8 David Ferrand, *La muse normande II*, ed. A. Héron (Rouen, 1891), p. 120.

9 Baptiste Le Chandelier, *La parthénie, ou banquet des palinods de Rouen en 1546*, ed. F. Bouquet (Rouen, 1883), pp. 4, 9, 17 and notes 58, 59, 103, 104, 159.

10 Although the first evidence is from the registers of the cathedral chapter, Nov. 25, 1565 (Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime (ADSM), *Inventaire-Sommaire des Archives Départementales, Serie G II: Registres du Chapitre (I-S reg. chap.)*, 267), it appears that the *puy* was already well-established by that time. Its establishment in the mid-century was part of a broader trend: Rouen in the middle of the sixteenth century experienced a period of cultural efflorescence, in which at least three other *puy*s, all poetic, were also established. See Dylan Reid, *Literary aspects of Urban Culture in Rouen, c.1500–c.1640* (M.Litt, University of Oxford, 1995), chapter 4, pp. 168–199.

Rouen and in neighbouring cities, and entries were received from all over France.¹¹ The competition was followed by a banquet, which is probably where songs of a less elevated tone were sung—in 1565, the Cathedral chapter intervened to forbid the Cathedral's choirboys from singing “chansons dissolutes, comme celles qui furent ... chantés au puy de Sainte-Cécile”.¹² This change in tone at the *puy* of Saint Cecilia again followed the model of the poetic *puy* of the Immaculate Conception, which held a contest of ribald love poetry during its banquet.

The Confraternity of Saint Cecilia was based in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, and made full use of the cathedral's considerable musical and other resources. The *puy* was held in the Cathedral itself, on a temporary stage decorated with a tapestry, carpets and paintings of the saint. The *maître de la chapelle*, the cathedral's full-time music master, received and took care of the musical submissions as they arrived.¹³ On the day of the contest, the music was performed by the cathedral choir and professional musicians under his direction. Rouen's *maîtrise* (music mastership) and the choir school the master directed were famous throughout France.¹⁴ The mastership was held by well-known musicians and composers, notably François Dulot (1522–1530) and Guillaume Leroy (1530–1536), whose compositions were published at the time, and still survive.¹⁵ Often, visiting royalty and aristocrats asked to be given one or two choirboys for their own chapel choirs.¹⁶ The choir's singing was enhanced by the music of the cathedral's organ, one of the largest in France. The post of organist was also held by a series of very distinguished musicians, including Nicolas Dulot, brother the *maitre de chapelle* François Dulot, and Jean Titelouze (1588–1633), a widely known composer and writer about music.¹⁷ Given these

11 ADSM G 9840, *passim*. This is a register of the confraternity's accounts from 1623 to 1631, drawn up in 1631.

12 *I-S Reg. chap.*, 267 (25 Nov. 1565).

13 ADSM G 9840, ff. 12r.-13v.

14 See A. Collette & A. Bourdon, *Histoire de la maîtrise de Rouen* (reprint: Geneva, 1972).

15 Collette, *Histoire de la maîtrise*, pp. 35, 43, 56, 115. The choir school also took the trouble to hire distinguished grammar masters for the non-musical education of their students. These included Guillaume Thibault, who wrote one of the plays quoted above (*La dame à l'agneau*), and Guillaume Haudent, who published several books, including a translation of Aesop.

16 These included the Admiral Annebault, the Queen of Scotland, and the Duc d'Orleans (*I-S Reg. chap.* pp. 253–257) as well as King Henri II himself (261). The Duc d'Orleans “voulait se former une chappelle de musique” around the choirboys he received⁷ from Rouen.

17 Christian Goubault, “La musique à Rouen du VIII^e siècle à nos jours”, *Revue Internationale de Musique Française* 4 (1981), pp. 84–85. Titelouze wrote two books, *Hymnes de l'église pour toucher sur l'orgue avec les fugues et recherches sur leur plain-chant* (1623) and *Magnificat ou Cantique de la Vierge pour toucher sur l'orgue suivant les huit tons de l'Eglise* (1626). He also wrote poetry for the *puy* of the Immaculate Conception. His most interesting poem (in praise of the Virgin, of course) is inspired by his work as an organist; it uses the refrain “D'un sourd metal une grande harmonie” (Joseph-André Guiot, *Les trois siècles palinodiques: histoire générale des palinods de Rouen*, ed. Abbé Tougard (Rouen, 1898), pp. 267ff.)

resources, the contestants' music must have received very good treatment, and the contest must have been a remarkable musical event for the city.

The Confraternity of Saint Cecilia was dominated by clerics, and its members were as distinguished as those of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception. In the 1620s, its members included the Archbishop and the suffragan Bishop, most of the officers of the cathedral chapter and many of the canons (including the organist), at least one president of a sovereign court, and several magistrates, lawyers and clerics.¹⁸ Members had to be affluent in order to bear the considerable expense of the banquet. In this regard, the *puy* of Saint Cecilia suffered similar problems to the *puy* of the Immaculate Conception. To show off his prestige and status, each Prince spent more on the decorations, prizes and banquet than the previous Prince. The race to excel one's predecessors became so ruinous that at times a Prince would refuse to pay anything at all.¹⁹

The confraternity of Saint Cecilia first encountered this problem in 1574. The Prince, Guerard, *curé* of Tournetot, refused to pay for anything other than the mass, claiming that the rest of the expenses were "chose inutile" and that he could not support such "extreme despence". As the date of the *puy* approached, the past Princes of the confraternity launched a lawsuit to force him to pay the other costs, including the banquet.²⁰ Their lawyer, De Bretignières, pointed out that Guerard had enrolled in the confraternity voluntarily and had happily eaten at earlier banquets. The representative of the *procureur général du Roi*, Bigot, then made an intervention in which he paraded his considerable erudition. He began by saying that the Greeks had had similar associations for the encouragement of learning, that music had been prized throughout history, and that it was considered valuable to the Church. Since the confraternity's purpose was to encourage musicians to serve the Church, he continued, it should be respected; and therefore, he concluded, Guerard should be made to pay not only for the mass, but also the for prizes and other expenses incurred in holding the contest. The banquet, however, could be left to Guerard's discretion. The confraternity's lawyer, De Bretignières, in an attempt to extract the banquet expenses as well, used a musical metaphor: "la musique est composee d'harmonie et ... celui qui discorde est ennemy". He added that it was necessary that the "estrangers qui apportent motets chansons et compositions" be properly received. This attempt to get the banquet included failed, though the confraternity did win the rest of the case. The Parlement ordered Guerard to pay not only for the mass but also for the prizes and other expenses of the contest.²¹

In 1601, the Confraternity of Saint Cecilia tried to get around this problem by stating in their new statutes that any Prince who did not want to organize the contest

18 ADSM G 9840, *passim*.

19 The Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception encountered this problem as well. See Reid, "Moderate Devotion", p. 9.

20 The past Princes formed the governing committee of the confraternity, an arrangement similar to that of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception.

21 BMR MS. Y 214(3), 306, Registres secrets du Parlement, 17 Nov. 1574.

and banquet could discharge himself from these duties by paying 200 *livres*.²² Princes often took advantage of this rule, and some even offered 300 *livres*, suggesting it was the work rather than the expense that they wished to avoid. This arrangement did not, however, resolve all problems. In 1628, the designated Prince was too poor to meet the expenses required, and the confraternity was obliged to cover the costs out of its own funds instead. In 1629, a much more scandalous situation arose. The Archbishop, whose turn it was to be Prince, refused either to arrange the *puy* or pay the 200 *livres*. The past Princes obviously judged it impolitic to sue the Archbishop, although given the precedents they would probably have won. Instead, “pour eviter au scandale public”, they restricted themselves to holding only the mass that year.²³

Despite these problems, the confraternity was in a very healthy financial state at this time. The year’s expenses were generally less than the 200 *livres* it received, and generous donors had in addition established *rentes* (annuities) on their behalf. In 1631, it had 1244 *livres* of reserves.²⁴ There may have been a brief interruption of the yearly contest in 1646,²⁵ but the *puy* of Saint Cecilia quickly recovered, and even established a new prize in 1666. The confraternity continued to hold its music contest up to the early eighteenth century.²⁶

For two centuries, the *puys* of the confraternities of the Immaculate Conception and especially of Saint Cecilia served as patrons of music in Rouen. They provided many benefits for many people: prestige for the Princes; praise for the Virgin; employment for the city’s musicians; an outlet for the talents of local and out-of-town composers; and, finally, fine music for the Church and the citizens of Rouen.

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22 ADSM G 9840, f. 10r–v. The same solution was tried by the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception.

23 ADSM G 9840, ff. 24r–30v.

24 ADSM G 9840, f. 38r–v.

25 The local poet David Ferrand wrote a poem regretting the demise of the *puy* of Saint Cecilia in 1546 (Ferrand, *Muse normand* III, p. 57). Soon after this, the older *puy* of the Immaculate Conception ceased to function, at least partially because no-one was willing to pay for the contest and banquet anymore (see Reid, *Urban Culture in Rouen*, p. 245).

26 ADSM G 3567 (various pieces relating to the Confrérie Ste.-Cécile).