

The Earliest Canadian Music Programme

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Work on the supplement to Marie Tremaine's *A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints* has led to serendipitous discoveries of a number of new titles invaluable for an understanding of our past. Among the most interesting of these is a previously unknown early broadside, printed in Montreal, giving the programme of a concert held in Montreal in 1786. This was found by the staff of the Department of Rare Books, McGill University Libraries, in the department's stacks.

The broadside is printed on a sheet of laid paper 31 cm. × 19 cm.; the chain lines are vertical and there is no watermark. A horizontal split in the middle of the sheet has been crudely repaired. The broadside is shelved with the Lande Canadiana Collection and has the call number: folio ML45 C66 1786. It has been filmed by the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions (CIHM).

Not only does this broadside shed light on the type of concert to which an audience in Montreal in 1786 would have listened, it illuminates part of the history of music in Canada. Printed by Fleury Mesplet at the Montreal Gazette Office and dated 29 août 1786 it was followed shortly after by an abridged bilingual announcement in the August 31 issue of the newspaper:

The Public are most respectfully informed, that Several Musicians From Europe, intend to give on Thursday the 7th of September 1786, a Concert, of Vocal and Instrumental Music, at Mr. John Franks Vauxhall. After the Concert a Ball. To begin precisely at Eight o'Clock. Tickets, at One Dollar each, to be had at the Printing Office, and at Mr. John Franks, Vauxhall. Montreal 29 August 1786.

The musicians "nouvellement arrivés d'Europe" brought with them a programme which would have been fashionable in the Europe of the day. They also followed custom in completing the evening with a ball.

The three musicians, Mr. and Mme. Mechtler and Mr. Duplessy, are only briefly mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* and documentary evidence is very scarce. Guillaume Mechtler, organist, teacher, composer was born in Brussels about 1763. He came to Canada with this concert tour and decided to remain in the colony. An advertisement in the *Quebec Gazette* for July 12, 1781 announced that he had "quitted entirely the business of the theatre" and would settle in Quebec City as a music teacher. By 1789 he had moved to Montreal and published this announcement in the *Montreal Gazette* for September 3, 1789:

Mr. Mechtler,
Begs leave to inform the Ladies and Gentlemen of Montreal that he has settled himself in this city as a Music Master, and intends to teach the forte piano, harpsichord and violin; he therefore flatters himself that he will meet with encouragement from those Ladies and gentlemen who may please to employ him, as they may depend that his conduct and attention to his Scholars shall be such as to merit their approbation and patronage. He lodges at present at Mr. Lemoine's next door to Sullivan's Coffee-House. Montreal, September 3, 1789.

In 1789 he was made assistant organist at Notre-Dame in Montreal, and in 1792, he was promoted to the post of general organist. During the next forty years, until his death, he was the leading church musician in the city. A musical programme announced in 1796 that he

CONCERT.

PLUSIEURS MUSICIENS nouvellement arrivés d'Europe, ont l'honneur d'informer le Public, qu'ils donneront, Jeudi le 7 du mois de Septembre, un *CONCERT* Vocal & Instrumental, composé de deux Actes; chez Mr. JEAN FRANKS, au Vauxhall.

ACTE PREMIER.

L'Ouverture de l'Opéra de la BATAILLE d'IVRY, composé par *Martiny*.

Un Concerto de FLUTTE, par *Mr. Duplessy*.

Une Ariette, tirée de l'Opéra d'*Artaxerces*, par *Me. Mechtler*.

Le Menuet de FISHER, avec les Variations sur la Clarinete, par *Mr. Duplessy*.

Une Symphonie, composée par *Lachnith*.

Une Ariette, tirée de l'Opéra du CADENAS, par *Me. Mechtler*.

ACTE SECOND.

Un Concerto de FORTE-PIANO, par *Mr. Mechtler*.

Une Ariette, tirée de l'Opéra de ROSINE, ou LES MOISSONEURS, par *Me. Mechtler*.

Un Concerto de CLARINETE, par *Mr. Duplessy*.

Une Symphonie de Schwnidl; Suivie

D'UN BAL.

L'on commencera à HUIT HEURES précises.

Les Billets feront de CINQ CHELINS, & feront distribués chez l'Imprimeur, & chez Mr. Jean Franks, au Vauxhall.

Montréal, 29 Août 1786.

Notes and Comments

would play "Un concerto de forte-piano," perhaps the same one as listed in this programme. There is a possibility that this was composed by him as in 1811 he was paid £48 for "works of his composition" and so became, according to the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, the first Canadian to be paid as a composer.

The singer, Mme. Mechtler was not Guillaume Mechtler's wife; he married in 1793, at the age of 29, Angèle Landriève of Montreal. Mme. Mechtler, the singer, later appeared in 1790-1792 in Halifax and then in New York and Boston.

Mr. Duplessy also decided to remain in the colony. On Thursday, October 26, 1786 a bilingual announcement was published in the *Montreal Gazette*:

Mr. Duplessy, respectfully informs the Public, that he intends teaching the Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, Hautboy, French-Horn, Violin and any Musical Instructions. He proposes likewise to teach Fencing. N.B. He lodges at Mr. Deshotel's in St. Alexis Street. Montreal, 14 October 1786.

This announcement appeared for several issues before Mr. Duplessy disappears from our sight, both as a music teacher, and as a fencing master.

Much of the music played at this concert was recently published and was very popular in Europe. *Henri IV, ou La Bataille d'Ivry* had been published in 1774 by Jean Paul Egide Martini. *Henri IV* was immensely popular, being translated into Dutch, German, Russian and Swedish. Martini, a highly acclaimed opera composer is best known today for his song "Plaisir d'amour." *Artaxerxes*, by Thomas Arne, was first produced in London in 1762; its first complete performance in North America was in New York in 1828. The Fisher mentioned in the programme is most probably Johann Christian Fischer, one of the most notable oboists of his day; Mozart wrote a set of piano variations on one of Fischer's minuets. Ludwig Wenzel Lachnith, a Bohemian who spent a great deal of time in Paris, published six symphonies. *Cadenas*, the opera, is a mystery. No reference work, including those on obscure operas, lists it at all. Egide Duni, an Italian who settled in Paris wrote *Les Moissonneurs* in 1768. One of the most important Opéra Comique composers in the latter half of the eighteenth century, he helped create a new musical style—the *comédie mêlée d'ariettes*, an example of which is shown on the programme. Friedrich Schwindl, the composer of twenty-eight symphonies, was immensely popular. According to the conventions of the time, the flute and clarinet concerti "par Mr. Duplessy" were probably not composed by him; he is simply listed as the performer. As has been mentioned previously there is some question as to the composer of the concerto for the forte-piano.

It is interesting to speculate on the success of this concert in the Montreal of the day. On Thursday September 21, 1786 an announcement appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* advertising another "Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music" at Mr. John Franks', to begin at six o'clock, followed by a Ball, on Tuesday, September 26. Tickets were again one dollar each but "no money to be received at the door, on any account what ever." The changes in the wording—the earlier time, the difference in ticket purchase—were perhaps the result of the experience of the previous concert.

This glimpse into the musical past of Canada can only tantalize the reader. Without a complete list one can only speculate as to who played the symphonies by Lachnith and Schwindl and the opera overture by Martini. No reviews of the concert exist so one can have no idea as to the reception this concert had. It is to be hoped that further research, into contemporary diaries perhaps, can provide us with more than a hint of the richness of our musical tradition.