

The composer and organist Michel Corrette was born in Rouen, where he was baptized on 10 April 1707. Here his father Gaspard Corrette was an organist, and his grandfather a dance master. At the age of thirteen he left his native town to continue his musical development in Paris; however, it is not known with whom he studied. In Paris, he seems to have focused initially on organ playing, because in 1727 he applied – unsuccessfully – for the position of organist at the Église de la Madeleine-en-la-Cité. His violin sonatas op. 1, published in 1727, are lost, but the Duos for two flutes op. 2 from the same year are preserved.¹ At first, he sustained his living as a music teacher for flute, violin and musette. By the time he married Marie-Catherine Morize in 1733, he was already a conductor of various ensembles. Between 1732 and 1773 he composed a total of 25 *Concertos comiques*, which served as interludes in the theatre.² His daughter Marie-Anne was born in 1734, his son Pierre-Michel in 1744. In addition, he was also active as an organist, both for members of the nobility, as well as 1737 in Sainte-Marie du Temple (destroyed in 1796), and from 1741 at the latest in the Jesuit church of Saint-Louis (now Église Saint-Paul-Saint-Louis).

In addition to 17 instructional books for various instruments and voice as well as many secular and sacred vocal works, he composed numerous lighter works for harpsichord and organ and a great deal of chamber music, especially for flute(s) and/or violin(s).³ Several concerti and other orchestral music, some of which can be performed by chamber ensembles, round off his rich compositional oeuvre, which he managed to produce even as an old man. He also wrote for new instruments like the clarinet in 1773, and the pianoforte in 1779 as well as in the “*Divertissemens pour le clavecin ou le forte-piano*” published in 1780. Michel Corrette died in Paris on 21 January 1795.

If Christmas is Christianity’s most popular feast in which music plays a special part, so is it not surprising that Corrette devoted several works for various instruments to this holiday. In France, vocal as

well as instrumental noëls play an important role. Corrette set popular noëls for organ, based chamber concerti⁴ on them, and finally in 1781 published symphonies in quartet form, which can be performed by orchestras as well as by chamber music ensembles:

Six Symphonies | en Quatuor | contenant les plus beaux | NOËLS | François et Etrangers | avec des Variations | Pour un 1^r. Violon ou Flûte, un 2^e. Violon, | Alto et Basse Chiffrée. | Ces Noëls se peuvent executer a grand orchestre, | à l’Office Divin. | Par M^r. Corrette. | Chevalier de l’ordre de Christ. | Prix 7[!] 4^s | A PARIS et à LION, | Aux Adresses Ordinaires de Musique. | Avec Privilege du Roy.

The four parts are labeled *Violino Primo*, *Violino Secondo*, *Alto* and *Organo*. This new edition of *Sinfonia II* contains two well-known French Noëls, which were also the basis for compositions by Gigault, Lebègue, Charpentier, Dandrieu, Delalande and Balbastre. The texts read:

Où s’en vont ces gais bergers, | Ensemble coste à coste ? | Nous allons voir Jésus-Christ | Né dedans une grotte. Où est-il le petit nouveau-né ? | Le verrons-nous encore ?

Laissez paître vos bestes | Pastoureaux, par monts et par vaux; | Laissez paître vos bestes, | Et allons chanter Nau.

The middle movement *Noël Polonois* is notated in the bass part on two systems, but the upper part is an octave higher than the analogous violin part. The indications “*Flauto o Cymbalo*” and “*Pizicatti*” suggest alternative arrangements: in one of these pizzicato strings would accompany the flute.

During Christmas celebrations, it might be attractive to perform not only a *Symphonie Noël* – as chamber music or for orchestra –, but also to play the corresponding movements from Corrette’s *Nouveau Livre de noëls* (1741) on the organ or harpsichord. For this reason we have included these Noëls in the appendix.

⁴ Concerto Noël Allemand for flute, 2 violins and b.c. BP 2095.

Concerto Noël Suisse for treble recorder, two violins and b.c. BP 2401.

¹ Six Sonatas op. 2 for two treble recorders, Amadeus BP 2054.

² Concerto comique op. 8/1 (“Le Mirliton”) BP 2010.

Concerto comique op. 8/3 (“Margoton”) BP 395.

Concerto comique op. 8/6 (“Le Plaisir des Dames”) BP 721.

³ Cf. www.amadeusmusic.ch for a current list.