

The composer and organist Michel Corrette was born in Rouen, where he was baptised 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). 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 piano-forte 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 concerti³ on them, and finally in 1781 published symphonies in quartet form, which can also be performed by orchestras:

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!4s | 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 *Symphonie V* contains seven French Noëls and as finale a *Noël suisse*. All these popular Christmas carols were also set by Dandrieu. Many composers set individual Noëls to music, mostly as *Noëls variés* for keyboard instruments, which could be played in church as well as at home. Particularly popular were the numbers 3: *Joseph est bien marié*, 6: *Or vous dites Marie*, and 8: *Noël suisse (Il est un p’tit l’Ange)*, which can be found in compositions by the following masters, among others: Gigault 1682 (6), Lebègue 1685 (6), Charpentier 1690 (3+6), Delalande before 1715 (6), Raison 1714 (3+6), Daquin 1757 (6+8), Balbastre 1770 (3+6+8), Beauvarlet-Charpentier 1782 (3+6+8), Antoine Lefébure-Wely 1823 (3+6+8) and Guilmant 1884 (3+6). Gigault also made a setting of No. 1. To be precise, *Joseph est bien marié* is a new text, i.e. a contrafactum, of the French nursery rhyme *Quand Biron voulut danser*. Apparently, the *Noël suisse* was introduced to France by Swiss mercenaries towards the end of the 16th century.

In his *Nouveau Livre de Noëls* (1741), Corrette set Noëls 1, 3–5 and 8 for a keyboard instrument. 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 on the organ or harpsichord. For this reason we have included these five Noëls in the appendix.

Harry Joelson

¹ Six Sonatas op. 2 for two treble recorders, 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 Concerto Noël Allemand for flute, two violins and b.c., BP 2095

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

Six Symphonies en Quatuor, published by Amadeus:

I. Symphonie Noël in d minor, BP 1291

II. Symphonie Noël in D Major, BP 2807

III. Symphonie Noël in G Major, BP 2809

IV. Symphonie Noël in d minor/D Major, BP 2819

V. Symphonie Noël in a minor, BP 2822

VI. Symphonie Noël in A Major, BP 2827