

# La vie musicale en Nouvelle-France

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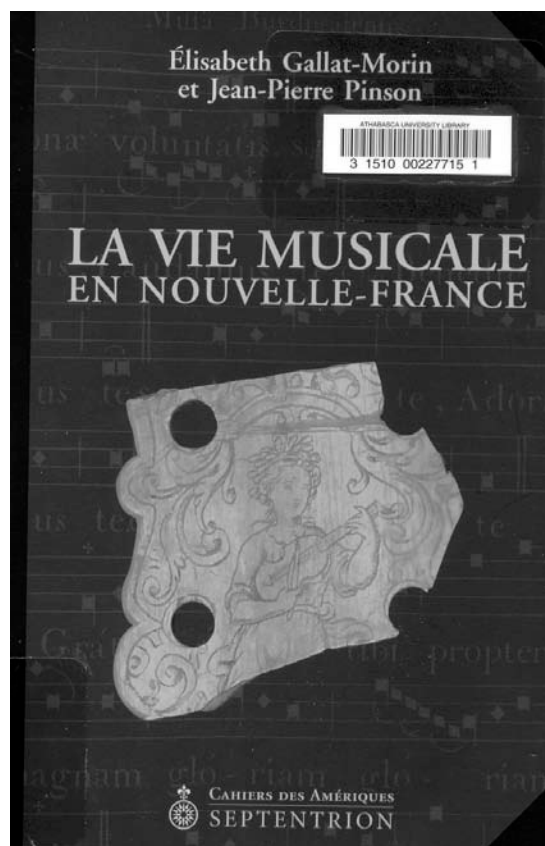
Élisabeth Gallat-Morin & Jean-Pierre Pinson.

*La vie musicale en Nouvelle-France.*

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Few musical instruments and fewer books (and, of course, no musical recordings) remain to teach us about musical culture before the English Regime in Canada. Many musicologists and other music specialists have therefore thought for years that very little musical activity took place during the French Regime (1600-1760). This is also what one would conclude from the work of the historian Francis Parkman or from the book *Music in Canada, 1600-1800* by musicologist Willy Amtmann, which remained for long the only French work on the Nouvelle-France era. In addition to the odd article in periodicals or the Encyclopaedia of Music in Canada, we finally have a book that can fill this great gap.

Élisabeth Gallat-Morin (Ph.D. musicology, Université de Montréal), is a harpsichordist. In 1978 she discovered in Montréal the most voluminous manuscript of French organ music of Louis XIV's time to survive until today. She has devoted two books to this and is still working to reconstruct the musical practices of Nouvelle-France. Jean-Pierre Pinson (Ph.D. musicology, Université de Montréal), is a professor of music history at Université Laval. A specialist in baroque performance practice, he has carried out research on the sources and practice of plainchant in the institutions and parishes of Nouvelle-France.

First of all, these authors deserve credit for the perseverance and patience they maintained in finding sources of information not easily available. Gallat-Morin and Pinson have diligently combed archives, inventories, chronicles, notarial documents, parochial correspondence and religious public records. After more than 15 years of meticulous research comes this book, divided in two parts: "La musique religieuse" and "La musique en société". This review will outline briefly the contents of each chapter in each part.

In Nouvelle-France religious music was pre-eminent; religion was the foundation of the new world and the new society. In the first chapter, Pinson examines parish institutions and public liturgical compositions. He covers musical life in Québec's cathedral and seminary, Montréal's parish community and music training in Jesuit schools, and describes the musical characteristics of the Mass and how its music gradually evolved to become more complex. In the second chapter Pinson portrays musical life in female religious institutions. The role and the use of chant for the religious communities of Ursulines and Hospitalières and the nuns of Notre-Dame de Montréal together with the rules they had to submit to is briefly but succinctly surveyed, based principally on the constitution, rules and records of each institution. Gallat-Morin follows with a chapter on organ music, where historical evidence enables us to build up a detailed chronological account of the role of the church organ in musical life. The fourth chapter, on plainchant, looks at liturgical music as revealed in its written sources, which are principally French. Pinson does a historical review of Gregorian chant and then looks at its usage in Nouvelle-France. Erich

Schwandt (a professor at the University of Victoria) contributes a chapter on motets, “la musique figurée” (vocal music which was not plain-chant but provided melodies for existing religious texts), and singing practice in convents. The first part finishes with a short four-page chapter on Protestant musical practice in Nouvelle-France, but before this comes an impressive chapter written by Paul-André Dubois (a Ph.D. student at Université Laval) on the European music used in Amerindian missionary institutions.

Dubois has taken up the challenge of research into a neglected subject where methodology and sources are very limited. The subject he covers so well is the use of European music in missions. Dubois explains how music became a tool for promoting conversion to Christianity. This chapter tells which communities were involved in mission work, where aboriginal resettlement villages were located, and what type of songs were taught. Dubois makes reference to three missionary manuscripts (two in the Huron language, one in Iroquois) and to two other manuscripts, these including musical notation. The second half of the chapter is devoted to a musical analysis of the motet “Inviolata”, which was translated into the Abenaki language. After explaining the “faux-bourdon” (singing in harmony) technique utilised at the time, Dubois shows how his analysis can help in understanding the musical practice and level of performance that was reached in Canadian missions during the French Regime.

As the second part of the book shows, there was a variety of secular music outside the church. Gallat-Morin traces social activities which involved music such as balls, concerts, governor’s ceremonies and theatres. Nouvelle-France was: “En somme, une société complète, mais en modèle réduit” (p.287). She continues by delineating the various actors in musical life, whether amateurs or professionals. It is delightful to learn about the roles played by civil servants, noblemen, dancing-masters, violin-makers and the military in musical life and customs of the time. One chapter is devoted to the similarities between French provincial capitals and Nouvelle-France and the ways in which French society was recreated and adapted overseas. The last chapter of the book, on French oral traditions in North America, was written by the eminent scholar Conrad Laforte, who has devoted his entire life to the study of *chansons* and *contes* in French oral tradition.

Laforte focuses on the repertoire of *voyageurs canadiens*, which is very representative of the continuity of European oral tradition. He begins with a review of written testimony by foreign visitors confronted

for the first time with *voyageur* rowing and boat songs. The chapter continues with an account of the *voyageur*’s life and the purpose and characteristics of the songs. Laforte concludes with an analysis of the concept of *survivance* and the recognition that prolonged geographical and cultural separation from France actually enabled a better conservation of traditional customs and songs than in the country of origin (p.440).

Ethnologists, musicologists, sociologists and historians will agree on the scientific value of this 570-page book. Numerous footnotes and Annexes satisfy the reader’s curiosity; bibliography and index are complete and detailed. An interesting feature is the very useful and instructive biographical inserts (sometimes with a portrait attached) which frequently accompany a name mentioned in the text and preempt the reader’s questioning; however, a separate index listing these would have been even more useful. Another practical aspect is the self-sufficiency of each chapter, rendering the information more accessible. Each musical custom is placed in a socio-historical context showing how each musical practice came about, and justifying the book’s title “musical life in Nouvelle-France”. Undoubtedly this book constitutes a primary source of accurate information on a subject hitherto neglected, and opens the gate to future research.