

**A commentary on the letter by Michel de La Barre concerning the history of musettes .**

**Mémoire de M. de La Barre sur les musettes et hautbois**

Lettre adressée à Monsieur de Villiers, à l'Hôtel de La Monnoye à Paris

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On trouve dans les archives de la Chambre des comptes quatre charges de hauboïs et musettes de Poitou, de la création du Roy Jean. Dans ces tems parbare au moins pour les arts, et sur tout pour la musique, on ne connoissoit d'autres istrumens que la musette, le hauboïs, la cornemuse, le cornet, le cromorne et le cacbouc (saqueboute ?) ; ce dernier estoit une espece de cornemuse, mais bien plus grand ; tous ces instrumens estoient bons pour rejouir les paysans et pour leurs dances ,quoy qu'ils s'acordassent tres mal, premiere-ment par l'ignorance de ceux qui en jouuent, et par le deffaut meme des instrument. Du vivant de François premier, on commença à se decrasser sur la musique ; un nommé Ducoroy, valet de chambre de sa maiesté et maitre de musique de sa chapelle, fut le premier et le seul qui en fit de belle pour ce tems la ; il voulut se servir de ces instrumens, mais il ne put jamais. On fut obligé de faire venir des violons du Milanois. Après sa mort, la musique retomba dans le barbare, et elle y est restée à tres peu pres, jusques au tams de Louis quatorse, sous le célèbre raygne ou tous les arts on esté portez a leur perfection, la musique a brillé infiniment. Le Camus, Boisset, Dembris et Lambert ont estez les premiers à faire des airs qui exprimassent les parolles, mais sur tout le celebre Luly ; on peut dire que on devroit l'apeller l'apollon de la France, mais son elevation fit la chute totalle de tous les entiens istrumens, a l'exception du hauboïs, grace aux Filidor et

*In the archives of the chamber of finance, one finds four positions with the title « hauboïs et musettes de Poitou », created by « Roy Jean ». During those uncivilized times at least for the arts, and especially for the music, they didn't know other instruments but the musette, the hauboïs, the bagpipe, the cornett, the cromorne and*

*the cacbouc (sackbut ?) ;the latter was a sort of bagpipe, but much longer ; all these instruments were good enough for the entertainment of peasants and for their dances, although they were not well in tune, first because of the ignorance of the people who played them, and also because of the defects of the instruments themselves. When king Francis the first was alive, music began to pull itself together ; a certain Ducoroy, a servant of his Majesty and a music master of his Chapel was the first and only one to produce fine music at that time ; he wanted to use these instruments, but, because of their quality, he never managed to. They had to bring violins from the region of Milan. After his death, music returned to its former uncivilized state, and remained more or less in this condition until the time of Louis the fourteenth, under whose reign all the arts have been brought to their perfection, and music became particularly brilliant. Le Camus, Boisset, Dembris and Lambert were the first to make airs which gave expression to the words, but above all the famous Luly ; he could be called the Apollo of France, although his promotion meant the downfall of all the old instruments except the hauboïs, Hautteterre, lesquels ont tant gâté de bois et soutenus de la musique, qu'ils sont enfin parvenus a le rendre propre pour les concerts. De ces tems la, on laissa la musette au bergers, les violons, les flutes douces, les theorbes et les violes prirent leur place, car la flute traverssiere n'est venue qu'apres. C'est Philbert qui en a jouer le premier en France, et puis presque dans le meme tems, Descoteaux ; le roy ausibien que toute sa cour, a qui cet istrument plut infiniment, adiouta deux charges aux quatres musettes de Poitou, et les donna a*

Philbert et Descoteaux, et ils m'ont dit plusieurs fois que le roy leurs avoit dit en les leur donnant qu'il souhaitoit fort que les six musettes fussent metamorphosés en flutes traversieres, qu'au moins elles seroient utiles, au lieu que les musettes n'estoient propre qu'a faire dansser les paisanes.

Voilà, Monsieur, tout ce que j'ay lu et ce que j'ay ouy dire touchant la musette. Je souhaite qu'il soit assez bien écrit pour que vous puissiez l'entendre. Je n'ay pu faire mieux ; ce n'est point mon métier d'ecrire ; je joue de la flute à votre tres humble service.

Je suis tres parfaitement, Monsieur, votre tres humble et tres obeissant serviteur.

Delabarre

*traverso did not arrive until later. Philbert was the first to play it in France, and almost immediately afterwards, Descosteaux. The instrument was a great success with the King and indeed everyone at court, and His Majesty caused two new positions to be created in the (ensemble called) Musettes du Poitou and conferred them on Philbert and Descosteaux, and they told me several times that the king had told them as he conferred these positions on them, that he firmly wished that the six musette positions would be transformed into traverso positions. Then they would be useful, since musettes were only appropriate to accompany the dances of peasant girls.*

*That is, Sir, all I have read and heard about the musette. I wish it were written well enough for you to understand it. I could do no better ; it is not my job to write ; I play the flute at your humble service.*

*I am, Sir, your most complete and humble servant.*

Delabarre

*Thanks to the Filidors and Hautteterres, who spoiled so much wood and played so much music that they finally succeeded in rendering it usable in ensembles. From that time on, musettes were left to shepherds, and violins, recorders, theorbos, and viols took their place, for the*

This document is to be found in the 'Papiers du Grand Ecuyer', a division of the 'Secrétariat de la Maison du Roy', Archives Nationales, serie O 1 878, n° 240. It was first brought to light and published in its original French by Marcelle Benoit.<sup>1</sup>

Document known as '**Mémoire de M. de La Barre sur les Musettes et hautbois**', letter sent to **Monsieur de Villiers, à l'Hôtel de la Monnoye à Paris**.

The document is undated, but was probably written around 1730, considerably later than the period, between 1650 and 1680, that saw important changes in woodwind making. Michel de La Barre, born in 1675, knew and worked with the main protagonists of this story. With his colleague Jacques Hotteterre, he belonged to the generation that immediately

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<sup>1</sup> Benoit, M., *Musiques de Cour, chapelle, chambre, écurie, 1661-1733* (Paris, 1971), p. 455.

followed the period of technical revolution in French woodwinds. As a traverso player, he studied with the first French flutist, Philibert Rebillé, and also with René Pignon dit Descosteaux, both cited in his letter. La Barre made his career at the Court as ‘Musicien de la Chambre’, at the ‘Académie royale’ and as a musician to important aristocratic figures like the Marquis de Villiers. He is portrayed in the famous painting of Tournières : ‘Les ordinaires de la musique du Roy’.<sup>2</sup> He died in 1743.

The purpose of La Barre’s letter is to inform his patron, the marquis de Villiers, on the history of musettes and hautbois. In fact, La Barre speaks not only of oboes and related instruments, but also of his own instrument, the transverse flute. In addition, he relates the instruments to their social, historical and political context ; the briefness of this letter, written in crude and common language brings out vigorously the main steps that were involved in the replacement of the traditional set of Renaissance instruments played throughout the whole of French society by highly sophisticated instruments, made exclusively for ‘art music’ at Court and in aristocratic circles. The old instruments, he says, were left to the peasants, the hautbois being the only exception. The way La Barre describes it, this appears to be a real revolution in the fields of artistic sensibility , music and instrument making. Along with this revolution, La Barre shows a change in the social attribution of instruments.

### 1 / A new social function of the instruments

Like most people at that time, La Barre, who affirmed his position as a court and ‘modern’ musician, deeply despised earlier times, and the old-fashioned instruments and music : ‘*During those uncivilized times at least for the arts, and especially for the music, one didn’t know other instruments but the musette, the haubois, the bagpipe, the cornett, the cromorne and the sackbut... they were badly in tune, first because of the ignorance of the people who played them, and then because of the defects of the instruments themselves*’. This contemptuous attitude underscores the partition that prevailed at the beginning of the seventeenth century between those whom Mersenne called ‘the ordinary musicians’ (les musiciens ordinaires)<sup>3</sup> organized in brotherhoods and guilds and maintaining traditional instruments, and the court musicians who play art music and new instruments. It is worth noticing that the development of the french baroque occurs in the middle class and aristocratic circles in the towns and the court. The rural and popular world had no part in this movement. There is in fact a close relation between the appearance of a new musical style, the instruments played, and the social and political organisation of the music. La Barre states clearly that the old woodwinds and especially the musette were left to the peasants and that they were replaced at court by violins, viols, recorders, theorbos and by the only old woodwind that through adaptation was able to survive in court and town, the hautbois. ‘*From that time on, musettes were left to shepherds, and violins, recorders, theorbos, and viols took their place...*’. These transformations happened progressively ; they affected first the strings and keyboard instruments as early as the reign of Louis XIII, and were consistent with a new vogue of the lute and the viol, used for accompanying the so-called ‘air de Cour’. La Barre noted this distinction and at the same time gave a nice definition of the air de Cour : ‘*Le Camus, Boisset, Dembris and Lambert were the first to make airs which gave expression to the words*’. In the *Harmonie Universelle*, published in 1636, Mersenne describes the old french viol, which was being replaced at the time by the new six-strings viol coming from

<sup>2</sup> London, National Gallery (reproduced as fig. 2 in Bowers, J.M., ‘La Barre, Michel de’, in *New Grove* 2, vol.14, p. 80) with a copy in Dijon Museum. The standing musician holding a transverse flute and looking at the music on the table is Michel de La Barre. Other sources mention for this musician the name of Jacques Hotteterre le Romain.

<sup>3</sup> Mersenne, Marin (1636), *l’Harmonie Universelle*, facsimile ed. (1963), CNRS Paris

England<sup>4</sup>. These stylistic and organological innovations, coming mainly from abroad (Italy and England), were immediately and eagerly adopted by the town and the court ; in the field of woodwind instruments, this process of innovation was much slower. Woodwinds and especially bagpipes and oboes belonged primarily to the rural majority of the population, still almost impervious to foreign influences ; besides which they were made by the peasants themselves or by guilds of instruments makers and musicians who were working on strongly established traditions. The guilds of musicians and instrument makers ('ménétriers' and 'faiseurs d'instruments de musique') were still very powerful at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and acted as a brake on the innovations in instrument making and music in general emanating from the court. Woodwind instruments began to change and adapt themselves in the court, among the players and makers of the 'Grande Ecurie' ; the modifications were very slow and gradual, thus corresponding to the social and economic heaviness of the musical brotherhoods and guilds ('confréries de musiciens et menestrandises') which were partly reflected in the organisation of the 'Grande Ecurie'. The whole range of instruments represented by the *ménétriers*, such as violins, *grands hautbois* (shawms), *hautbois* and *musettes de Poitou*, formed the basic structure of the *Grande Ecurie*, and the various instrumental groups were established at the time of Francis I. One of these groups, the *Violons, hautbois, sacqueboutes et cornets*, faithfully reproduced – although with a larger number of musicians (twelve instead of six or eight) – the composition of the traditional wind ensemble that could be found everywhere in France. The *Violons, hautbois, sacqueboutes et cornets*, although consisting exclusively of oboes and bassoons since the years 1670, kept this title into the beginning of the eighteenth century ; thereafter they were entitled the *Douze grands hautbois de la Grande Ecurie*.

The resistance to change could only be broken by the strong individual will of a man, Lully, acting as the agent of the esthetic and political project of Louis XIV. With his proper words and his own feeling, de La Barre expresses this contradiction and the importance of both persons, Louis XIV and Lully. This is not so much the reign of Louis XIV which is important for music, but also the person himself, allied to Lully : '*...music returned into obscurity, and remained almost in this condition until the time of Louis the fourteenth, under whose reign all the arts have been brought to their perfection, and music has become particularly brilliant. ... above all the famous Lully ; one can say he should be called the Apollo of France, but his promotion meant the down fall of all the old instruments...*'. This last sentence referred to the replacement of the old woodwind instruments at court, but not to their suppression throughout the country. The musette, the grand hautbois, the hautbois de Poitou, the sackbut, the cornett (in the form of the serpent) continued to be played, with very few morphological changes, in rural and popular France until the end of the nineteenth century. They disappeared with the sociological and economical changes in the rural world, and they were achieved by the folk and traditional revival, both events which occurred from 1850 on.

## **2/ The historical background. The italian influence.**

La Barre began his historical account with the creation of four positions in the '*hautbois and musettes de Poitou*' by King Jean II Le Bon (the brave) who reigned in France from 1350 until 1364 ; but La Barre's historical sense was extraordinarily limited and he made only one exception to his general contempt for '*those uncivilized times*' and their people : this is Du Caurroy who '*was the first and only one to produce fine music at that time*'. And indeed, Eustache Du Caurroy (1549-1609) was the only musician prior to the seventeenth century to enjoy a serious reputation among later musicians. Marin Mersenne

<sup>4</sup> Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, vol. iv, pp. 190-4.

said of him : ‘ Du Caurroy emporte le prix pour la grande harmonie de sa composition et de son riche contrepoint... Tous les compositeurs de France le tiennent pour leur maître’. ‘ *Du Caurroy is superior in the great harmony of his composition and for the wealth of his counterpoint...Every composer in France honors him as their master.*’ Mersenne included a ‘*Pie Jesu*’ of Du Caurroy in the Harmonie Universelle. It is worth noticing that Du Caurroy was master of the Chapel of Henri IV rather than Francis the First, as de La Barre mistakenly wrote. King Henry IV created the position of « surintendant de la musique » for Du Caurroy, so that he was one of the direct predecessors of J. B. Lully.

Italian influence on french music was not understood by de La Barre as a stylistic contribution, but only as a replacement of obsolete instruments by new violins. ‘*They had to bring violins from the region of Milan*’ no doubt refers to the italian musicians and artists who came to France under Francis I and his successors during the second part of sixteenth century. The region of Milan (and the Piemont) was famous for its dancers and violinists ; in 1554, the Maréchal de Brissac, french governor of Piemont, sent a violin band conducted by the famous Baldassarino di Belgioioso (Balthasar de Beaujoyeux) to Queen Catherine de Medici.<sup>5</sup> The fact that de La Barre describes the first wave of italian artistic immigration and not the second, which happened during the regency of Anne d’Autriche under the influence of Mazarin, reflects clearly the ambiguity of the french attitude, and especially that of the young Louis XIV and his court towards Italy and the italian musicians protected by Mazarin. The king and his entourage of courtiers were fascinated by those italian musicians, singers, architects, painters, but at the same time were a little frightened of their way of translating the new baroque dream in art. We can mention the misadventures of Cavalli, Vigarani and the architect Bernini in France. To celebrate the king’s wedding, Mazarin ordered Vigarani to construct the somptuous Tuileries theater for the performance of Cavalli’s ‘*Ercole amante*’ : the job was deliberately bungled by french workmen. Cavalli’s opera, conceived as the quintessential expression of the new style, was a failure, except for the ‘*entrées*’ composed by Lully<sup>5</sup>. Cavalli, like Bernini and all the italians imported by Mazarin did not fit into Louis XIV’s vision of the monarchy. They were given golden handshakes and Lully took their place. La Barre, unaware of the italian influence on music and the arts at the beginning of Louis’s reign, repeated the officially correct political story, designed to confirm a new royal absolutism and an exclusively french conception of music. He therefore emphasized the two basic elements of the french baroque in music : 1/ the « air de cour » and 2/ Lully.

‘*Le Camus, Boisset, Dembris and Lambert were the first to make airs which gave expression to the words*’ is a short and concise way of describing the passage from the polyphony of the french ‘chanson’ to the solo air accompanied by continuo.

Lully - At the beginning of Louis XIV’s reign, Lully conveniently lost his italian ‘i’, replacing it with the french ‘y’. Lully understood that the young Louis XIV, with whom he became close, represented the new power in France. He and the young king did everything necessary to put music at the service of the royal glory. Lully’s work was in fact a kind of political publicity and propaganda. Lully was clever enough to maintain the traditional structures of court music and simply add them to his own ensemble which carried a new style and new instruments. To the ‘24 violons’ still attached to the old brotherhood of St Julien, he superimposed his own 12 ‘petits violons’, accountable only to him. Musical positions at court were defined by the kind of the instrument played ; for the woodwinds, these posts still carried the titles they had had more than a century before : the Douze Grands Hautbois were still called the *Violons, hautbois, sacqueboutes et cornets*. Like Lully, Louis XIV did not change the titles but encouraged their replacement by new instruments. The introduction of the new hautboy and later the traverso occurred inside the existing structures, and following a

<sup>5</sup> Anthony, J.R., *French baroque Music from Beaujoyeux to Rameau* (2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn, 1978, London), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Beaussant Philippe (1992), *Lully ou le musicien du soleil*, Gallimard / Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris.

process described by de La Barre for the transverse flute ; two existing positions of the old ‘hautbois et musette de Poitou’ were conferred upon Philibert Rebillé and René Pignon dit Descosteaux, in order to give the new transverse flute official status at court, along with the musette and hautbois de Poitou.[Both flutists were first mentioned in ‘l’Etat des officiers de la Maison du Roy’ in 1667 as substitutes to two vacant places of *Hautbois et musettes de Poitou* :<sup>6</sup> ‘...François Pignon Descoutteaux (demeure à Laval : son filz [René Pignon] joue à sa place avec les musettes) ; Jean-Louis Brunet (dans le Prieuré de St Berthelley ; ledit Jean-Louis est filz de Jean Brunet, et il n’a point de certificat). Philebert Rebillé est reçu à sa place. Nota : point d’employ’. ‘...François Pignon Descoutteaux (lives in Laval : his son [René Pignon] plays instead of him with the *musettes*) ; Jean-Louis Brunet (in the Priory of St Berthelley ; the aforesaid Jean-Louis is son of Jean Brunet, and he has no certificate). Philebert Rebillé is qualified instead of him. Nota : no employment’. As La Barre says, this last note probably means that Philebert Rebillé was occupying a place of *hautbois et musette du Poitou* without playing this instrument, since during the same year, ‘le Sr Philbert’ is quoted as ‘Joueur de flutte ordinaire du Cabinet’ in ‘*les comptes de la Maison du Roy. Menus Plaisirs*’ and was appointed two times for 400 lt (*livres tournoi*).

The aim of Lully, as can be inferred from the evolution of music and instruments, was to facilitate the unification in the same ensemble of instruments which were previously played separately. This is the meaning of the phrase : ‘...except the haubois, thanks to the Filidors and Hutteterres, who spoiled so much wood and played so much music that they finally succeeded in rendering it usable in ensembles.’ In French, de La Barre used the term ‘concerts’ which, in the language of the seventeenth century, meant at the same time a piece of music played together and the action of playing in an ensemble. The hautboy transformed by the Filidors and Hutteterres was therefore the first woodwind to be added to the violin band to form what would later be called the orchestra. Who were those Filidors and Hutteterres ‘*who spoiled so much wood...*’ ? Without looking for a definitive answer, it is possible to offer some clues ; judging from the probable period of these events (roughly between the death of Louis XIII in 1643 and 1670) the Philidors could be Michel Danican who lived until 1659 and was the preferred hautboist of Louis XIII (the king himself gave him the surname Filidori), and two members of his immediate family who had titles as ‘Joueurs de fifres’ and ‘cromornes’, Jean and André Danican dits Philidor. The Hotteterres were probably Jean Hotteterre, first of the name and a famous musette maker, his brother Nicolas (died in 1693), and Nicolas’s son of the same name (dit l’Aîné, the elder).

## 2/ The instruments

De La Barre’s letter is entitled ‘Mémoire sur les musettes et haubois’. Both instruments are immediately associated and immediately related with a popular and peasant context. ‘*During those uncivilized times ...one didn’t know other instruments but the musette, the haubois, the bagpipe, the cornett, the cromorne and the sackbut ... all these instruments were good enough for the entertainment of peasants and for their dances.*’ De La Barre’s list of wind instruments, by the way, accurately reflects the instrumentation of French popular and traditional wind ensembles, which is also represented at the court in the groups of the ‘Grande Ecurie’ : ‘Hautbois et musettes de Poitou’, ‘joueurs de violons, hautbois, saqueboutes et cornets’, ‘cromornes et trompettes marines’. Although these instruments were good enough for peasants and their dances, some of them were still in use at court, at least at the beginning of Louis’s reign.

<sup>6</sup> Benoit Marcelle, *Musiques de cour, chapelle, chambre, écurie*, 1661-1733, p. 18-19.

For more background on the instruments de La Barre briefly described, we can refer to Marin Mersenne. In his « Harmonie Universelle », published in 1636, Mersenne gave a fairly complete framework of the woodwind instruments in use at that time in France ; like de La Barre, Mersenne distinguished three closely associated types of reed instruments :

1/ The musette, i.e. the musette de Poitou, which was a bagpipe with one drone. The chanter of this instrument, with its fontanelle, was called the ‘hautbois de Poitou’. The hautbois and musette de Poitou formed together a complete family of instruments with a treble (dessus), using both the musette de Poitou and the hautbois de Poitou, a tenor size (taille), and a bass.(fig.p. 306, H.U., livre cinquième).

2/ The hautbois itself, or grand hautbois as it was called by Mersenne ; it was always a specific uncapped double reed instrument, similar in shape and morphology to the european shawm. (fig. p. 295, H.U., livre cinquième).

3/ The cornemuse, called ‘chalemie’ by Mersenne, which is a bagpipe with two drones played at the court concurrently with the musette until the 1660s (fig. p. 283, H.U., livre cinquième).

In French, the relationship between the word hautbois and the bagpipe had more than one dimension. As we already noticed, apart from the grand hautbois, the oboe family in France includes a wide range of bagpipes and capped reed instruments. All these instruments could be played in two ways : first, in the way they were originally conceived with the windbag and the cap, and second, with the reed of the chanter directly between the lips. At the moment the player pulled the chanter out of the bag or the cap and played it with his own embouchure, this chanter became an hautbois. There existed, in other words, both a semantic and an organological meaning of the word ‘hautbois’ : to play the oboe could refer to a way of playing (to play ‘à la oboe’, or ‘oboe-way’) as well as to the act of playing a specific instrument, the hautbois.

It is for this reason that the 17<sup>th</sup> century French hautbois and its evolution cannot be understood apart from the contemporary bagpipes and capped reed instruments. The relationship between the musette de Poitou and the hautbois de Poitou is an example, valid for every bagpipe, of the overlapping identity between the chanter of the musette and the hautbois.

A second division is superimposed on the categories of instruments defined above, which is based on the overall lengths and registers of instruments. Each family of instruments was divided into two consorts (*jeux* in French), based on the theoretical length of the bass of each consort, 4 or 8 feet. Like the recorder family, oboes were thus divided into ‘*grand et petit jeu*’ (big and small consort), corresponding, as Mersenne wrote, to ‘*le petit et le grand jeu des orgues*’. When he writes on oboes, Mersenne implies this division into consorts. The title of the chapter is : ‘*How to explain the figure, the range, the fingerings, the tuning and the use of the grands Haut-bois*’ and he immediately says : ‘*It should be said that there are two sorts of Haut-bois used in France, which are those de Poitou, whose form I will give in the XXXIId chapter, and those that are simply called Haut-bois, whose shape is similar to the grandes flutes douces ou d’Angleterre.*’

Mersenne called the hautbois ‘grand hautbois’, just as he called recorders ‘grandes flutes douces’, because they both belonged to the ‘grand jeu’. He described the dessus (treble) and its taille (tenor) ; the bass of the grand hautbois was the bassoon and the ‘basse de hautbois’. In France, the grand hautbois or hautbois was the only instrument of the oboe family that was conceived for playing with the reed directly controlled by the embouchure and without bag or reed cap. The hautbois de Poitou, on the other hand, was related to the petit jeu ; it also consisted of three sizes, as we noticed above. This partition into consorts was still valid in the first french baroque period, and was marked by consistent morphological and tuning differences. The main morphological characteristic which distinguished the hautbois

and the hautbois de Poitou was the length and shape of the bell. The characteristics of both instruments (indeed, both consorts) were gradually adapted and transformed. Protomorphic hautbois kept elements of the 'grand hautbois' and the 'hautbois de Poitou', as we shall see with the contribution of Bruce Haynes .

In my opinion, considering the name employed by de La Barre, the nature of the hautbois '*that they finally succeeded in rendering usable in ensembles*' was probably an adaptation of the grand hautbois, therefore with a long bell. The iconography detailed by B. Haynes will help us to fix the shape of this new 'protomorphic' hautboy which could have been in use at the court from the beginning of the 1650s until the middle of the 1670s. Considering these dates, it is unlikely that de La Barre would have spoken of the 3-keyed french hautboy known only afterwards, from the middle of the 1670s on.

We can deduce from La Barre's letter that the new 'protomorphic' hautboy appeared before the new transverse flute, as de La Barre says : '*...for the traverso did not arrive until later*'. The appearance of the transverse flute at court is therefore assigned by La Barre to the appointment of Descosteaux and Rebillé as flute players on the positions of two *hautbois et musettes de Poitou*, and we have seen that this could date from the year 1667. The engraving which represents a shepherd playing a three-keyed hautboy in the frontispice of the Borjon de Scellery method for the musette is dated from 1672 ; this could be a clue for the date of appearance of the e-flat key on the traverso and the hautboy ; with the adaptation of this device on both instruments, the transformation of the Mersenne 'grand hautbois' and the Renaissance transverse flute into baroque instruments was achieved.

The iconography studied by Bruce Haynes (borders of the Arazzo Gobelins tapestry 'l'Air' and the carton 'Avril au château de Versailles' by Lebrun), along with the measurements<sup>6</sup> of a shawm like instrument preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in New York which shows striking similarities to the 'grand hautbois' depicted in the Arazzo Gobelins borders, led me to attempt a reconstruction of this 'protomorphic' hautboy. Keeping the outer shape of the Gobelins and Lebrun instrument, I adapted and transposed the bore characteristics and acoustic lengths of the Metropolitan Museum instrument ; I arrived thus to a one-keyed 'grand hautbois', tuned in D with six tone holes closed, playing the diatonic major scale of D major in natural fingering, and tuned closed to the intervals of a meantone temperament. Depending on the reed setup, the pitch of the instrument can vary from 392 Hz to 400 Hz. I adapted to this instrument a reed made following the indications of the Talbot manuscript, whose measurements were discussed recently by Bruce Haynes<sup>7</sup>. Two instruments are shown in plate X.4 ; apart from ornamentation details, both *grands hautbois* are identical and conceived as a pair of woodwinds able to play in an ensemble.

Tonne, june 1999  
Marc Ecochard

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<sup>6</sup> The measures of this instrument were made by the hautboist Taka Kitizato.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Haynes : 'A reconstruction of Talbot's hautboy reed', to be published in next issue of *The Galpin Society Journal*, n° 53.

## Iconography

Fig. 1 - Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, livre cinquième, fig.p. 306.  
The hautbois and musette de Poitou family of instruments.

Fig. 2 – Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, livre cinquième, fig. p.295.  
Dessus and taille de grand hautbois.

Fig. 3 – Marin Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, livre cinquième, fig. p. 283.  
The cornemuse or chalemie .

Fig. 5 – The ‘grand hautbois’ in D.

### **A commentary on the letter by Michel De la Barre concerning the History of Musettes**

#### **Corrections and queries :**

p. 3, line 4 : the title of Marcelle Benoit’s book is : *Musiques de Cour. Chapelle, Chambre, Ecurie, 1661-1733* ; it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume (sources and documents) of her thesis on *Versailles et les Musiciens du Roy*.

p.3, fn 2 : Benoit, M., *Musiques de Cour. Chapelle, Chambre, Ecurie, 1661-1733* (Paris, 1971), p. 455.

p. 3, fn 3 : Painting by Robert Tournières existing with a copy in Dijon museum and London, National Gallery (reproduced as Fig. 2 in Bowers, J.M., ‘La Barre, Michel de’, in Sadie, S. and Tyrrell J. (eds), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edition (London 2001), vol. 14, p. 80). The standing musician holding a transverse flute and looking at the music on the table is Michel de la Barre. Philipp Bate, followed by Bruce Haynes (personal communication), pointed out how much this standing figure resembles the portray of Jacques Hotteterre le Romain in his ‘Principes de la flûte traversière...’

p. 4, fn 5 : Mersenne, M., *Harmonie Universelle* (Paris, 1636-37 ; facs. : Paris, 1963), livre quatrième, proposition IV, p. 189.

p. 4, line 37 : More than a moderating influence, the guilds of ‘ménétriers’ (especially the ‘Confrérie de Saint Julien’ in Paris) were resisting, inclusively with judiciary procedures, against the increasing power of the Court music and the Academies of dance and music.

p. 4, bottom : ‘The modifications thus corresponded ... ‘Grande Ecurie’. In fact, I said the contrary. I propose thus the following text, which could replace the sentences from line 34 to line 43 and give more explanations on the organization of the ‘Grande Ecurie’ :

At the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV, the guilds of ‘ménétriers’ (especially the ‘Confrérie de Saint Julien’ in Paris) were still powerful and were resisting, inclusively with judiciary procedures, against the increasing power of the Court music and the Academies of dance and music. Among the players and makers of the ‘Grande Ecurie’, woodwind instruments began to change, but the modifications were very slow and gradual, thus corresponding to the resistance of the musical brotherhoods and guilds which were partly reflected in the organization of the ‘Grande Ecurie’.

The whole panel of instruments primarily attached to the ‘ménétriers’ such as violins, grands hautbois (shawms), hautbois and musettes de Poitou, formed actually the basic structure of the ‘Grande Ecurie’, of which the various instrumental groups were installed at the time of Francis I. One of these groups, the ‘Violons, hautbois, sacqueboutes et cornets’ faithfully reproduced, although with a larger number of musicians (12 instead of 6 or 8), the setting of the traditional wind ensemble which could be found everywhere in France, in the service of towns or in associations. The ‘violons, hautbois, sacqueboutes et cornets’, although exclusively formed with oboes and bassoons since the beginning of the 1670s, will keep this title until the beginning of the XVIIIth century. They will be entitled the ‘Douze grands hautbois de la grande Ecurie’ only afterwards.

For this last paragraph, please check the following French translation :

Tous les instruments représentatifs et emblématiques des ménétriers, violons, grands hautbois, hautbois et musettes de Poitou, constituent en fait l’ossature de la « Grande Ecurie », dont les différents groupes sont définitivement mis en place à l’époque de François Ier. L’un des ensembles de la « Grande Ecurie », les « Violons, hautbois, sacqueboutes et cornets » reproduit fidèlement, quoique avec des effectifs plus nombreux (12 au lieu de 6 ou 8), la composition de l’ensemble à vent traditionnel que l’on trouvait partout en France, au service des villes ou en associations itinérantes. Constitués essentiellement de hautbois et de bassons dès les années 1670, les « violons, hautbois, sacqueboutes et cornets » ne prendront le nom des « Douze grands hautbois de la Grande Ecurie » qu’au début du XVIIIe siècle.

p.5, fn 7 : the quotation about Du Caurroy comes from *Harmonie Universelle*. I couldn’t localise it precisely. It is quoted by Madeleine Garros, *Histoire de la Musique*, coll. La Pléiade, ed. Gallimard, t.1, p. 1592.

p.5, fn 8 : Mersenne, M., *Harmonie Universelle*, ‘livre sixiesme de l’art de bien chanter’, t. II. .

p.6, line 35 : replace ‘configuration’ by ‘ensemble’ .

p.6, fn 10 : Beussant, P., *Lully ou le musicien du Soleil* (Paris, 1992), p. 232. Also Powell, J.S., *Music and Theatre in France 1600-1680* (Oxford, 2000). I don’t know this last reference, but it can be quoted along with Beussant.

p.7, line 15 : In order to explain the meanings of the French word ‘concert’, I propose to add this paragraph : (as for the preceeding, please check my English with the French text).

But which sort of ensemble La Barre is referring to when he speaks of this hautbois ‘that they finally succeeded in rendering it usable in ensembles.’? Is this ensemble the woodwind consort, common at that time, and for which the grand hautbois (shawm) was perfectly adapted, or the rather new consort of strings with the thorough bass, to which the transformed hautbois will be added? As for this last assumption, the French word ‘concerts’ could really have the meaning of ‘mixed’ consorts (strings and woodwinds), equivalent to the English ‘consort’. In any case, it is clear through this text that the transformation of the hautbois by the ‘Filidors and Hautteterre’ has given to this instrument the ability of playing together with different instruments; it was therefore the first woodwind to be added to the violin band to form what would later be called the ‘orchestra’.

Mais à quel type de concert de la Barre fait-il allusion lorsqu’il parle de ce hautbois rendu « *propre pour les concerts* »? S’agit-il de l’ensemble homogène d’instruments à vent, courant à l’époque, et pour lequel le grand hautbois était parfaitement adapté, ou bien de la réunion nouvelle à bien des égards, des instruments à cordes autour de la basse continue, et à laquelle le hautbois transformé va venir s’adjoindre? Dans cette dernière hypothèse, *les concerts* auraient bien entre autres le sens d’ensembles « mélangés », à cordes et à vent, équivalent en cela au « consort » anglais. Dans ce texte, il est bien clair, en tout état de cause, que c’est sa transformation par les « *Filidor et Hautteterre* » qui a rendu le hautbois apte au jeu en ensemble hétérogène (cordes et vents);

p.8, lines 27-32 : The sentence; ‘The relationship between ... the *hautbois*’ could be replaced by : ‘As for several bagpipes, the chanter of the *musette de Poitou* and the *hautbois de Poitou* itself are strictly identical’.

p.8, fn 12 : Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, livre cinquième, proposition VIII, p. 238.

p.9, fn 13 : Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, livre cinquième, proposition XXXI, p. 295.

p. 10, final sentence : ‘Two instruments are shown in Plate X.4. Apart from ornamentation details, both *grands hautbois* are identical and conceived as a pair of woodwinds able to play in an ensemble’.

