



*Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre. Porträt von François de Troy (1645-1730)*

### Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre

Birth name: Élisabeth-Claude de Jacquet

\* 17 March 1665 in Paris,

† 27 June 1729 in Paris,

Likely, Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was born on March 15th or 16th, 1665, since she was baptized on March 17th, 1665.

Harpsichordist, composer

"On peut dire que jamais personne de son sexe n'a eu d'aussi grands talens qu'elle pour la composition de la musique, & pour la manière admirable dont elle l'exécutoit sur le Clavecin & sur l'Orgue."

("One can say that never before did a person of her gender possess such a great talent for musical composition and for the admirable way in which she played the harpsichord and the organ.")

(Edouard Titon du Tillet. *Le Parnasse François*. Paris:

1732, R Geneva: 1971, p. 636)

### Profile

Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was an extraordinarily successful French composer and harpsichordist who spent her youth at the court of Louis XIV and later successfully continued her career as a professional musician as one of an artist couple and as a widow.

### Cities and countries

In the centralist-orientated French Kingdom of the 17th century, the musical career of Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was concentrated exclusively on the court and city of Paris. No documentation of the musician's travels has been handed down.

### Biography

Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was baptised on 17 March 1665, so her date of birth must have been shortly prior to this. Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre, daughter of the Parisian organist Claude Jacquet († 1702) and his wife Anne de la Touche († 1698), had three siblings who were also active as professional musicians: Nicolas (approximately 1662–1707, harpsichord teacher and organist at Saint-Pierre in Bordeaux), Anne (1664–1723/26, harpsichordist for Mademoiselle de Guise) and Pierre (1666–1739, organist at Saint-Nicolas-du Chardonnet and later successor to his father at Saint-Louis-en-l'Île in Paris). The family also included the uncle of Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet, a well-known Parisian instrument builder.

Claude Jacquet taught his daughter painstakingly; she rapidly developed into a skilled harpsichordist and composer.

### At the court of Louis XIV

At the age of five, Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre played for King Louis XIV, who was greatly moved by the art of the young harpsichordist. Madame de Montespan, his mistress, then took the girl under her wing. Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was thus able to enjoy an aristocratic upbringing.

The young girl was soon known throughout the city as a wunderkind. In 1678, the "Mercure galant" called "la petite Mademoiselle Jaquier" ("little Mademoiselle Jaquier/Jacquet") a "merveille de nostre Siecle" ("a wonder of our century"). During this year, she played the harpsichord at a series of operatic performances at the house of Louis Le Mollier ("Mercure galant" 1678, pp. 126-130).

She performed at the court and played at house concerts of the nobility. It was reported that she played and sang the most difficult pieces from sight and that she accompanied and composed on the spur of the moment ("Mercure galant", July 1677). In 1685 the Marquis de Dangeau made the following note in his diary: "1er juillet, 23 juillet, 9 août. - Il y eut chez Monseigneur un petit Opéra dont la petite Mademoiselle Jacquet a fait tous les airs. Elle n'a, je crois, que 20 ans." ("1 July, 23 July, 9 August – At Monseigneur's there was a small operatic performance for which the little Mademoiselle Jacquet did all the arias. She is, I believe, only 20 years old." Chantal Masson: "Journal du Marquis de Dangeau", p. 198).

In 1687 a first printed edition was issued with compositions of Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre. These were "Les Pièces de Clavecin. Premier livre" with four harpsichord suites, each consisting of a "Prélude" (three "Préludes non mesurés" and a "Tocade") and various suite movements. The Préludes, in particular, captivated listeners with their richness of dissonances and Italian-influenced timbres. The printed edition was dedicated to King Louis XIV.

### Marriage

A major change in the life of Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet was her marriage on 23 September 1684 to the organist Marin de la Guerre (1658–1704). She left the court of Louis XIV as a result of this. Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre lived by the side of her husband as an active and acknowledged artist. She regularly organised concerts in her flat and gave harpsichord lessons. Probably her best-known pupil was her godson, Louis-Claude Daquin. "Le livre commode des adresses de Paris" by Pradel from the year 1691 expressly lists both husband and wife under the heading "Maîtres pour le Clavecin". Titon du Tillet reported on the woman musician of whom it was said that "tous les grands Musiciens & les bons Connoisseurs alloient avec empressement l'entendre toucher le Clavecin: elle avoit sur-tout un talent merveilleux pour preluder & jouer des fantaisies sur le champ, & quelquefois pendant une demie heure entiere elle suivait un prelude & une fantaisie avec des chants & des accords extrêmement variez & d'un excellent goût qui charmoient les Auditeurs." ("All great musicians and connoisseurs of music were very keen indeed to hear her at the harpsichord. In particular, she had a wonderful talent enabling her to perform preludes and fantasies on the spur of the moment, and sometimes she followed, for an entire half-hour, the flow of her ideas in a prelude and a fantasy wi-

th extraordinarily varied melodies and chords, as well as excellent goût, that enchanted all listeners." Titon du Tillet. Le Parnasse Français, p. 636)

In 1694 her 'tragédie en musique' "Cephale et Procris" was performed and published at the Académie Royale de musique in Paris. Despite enthusiastic reports, however, only a few performances took place.

### Life as a widow

The only son resulting from the marriage of Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet and Marin de la Guerre, who apparently had inherited his mother's musical talent, died in 1704 at the age of ten. Marin de la Guerre also died during that same year.

The widow continued her musical activities. In 1707 she published the six Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord that had already been composed around 1695, as well as the "Pièces de Clavecin qui peuvent se joüer sur le Violon". With the publication of the first volume of her "Cantates françaises sur les sujets tirez de l'Écriture" of 1708, she founded a new genre of composition that would later be taken up by composers such as Louis Nicolas Clérambault, Jean-Baptiste Morin, Sébastien de Brossard and André Campra. The "Journal des sçavants" referred to the novelty of the genre in 1709 in the following terms: "Comme ces Cantates sont d'un genre nouveau, nous ne sçaurions nous dispenser d'y faire attention. On avoit crû jusqu'ici qu'il n'y avoit que le Badinage & le Merveilleux de la Fable, qui fussent propres à la Musique. Des personnes accoutumées à se défendre des préjugés, ont crû qu'on pouvoit faire de la Musique un usage plus noble & plus utile, & cependant aussi agreable. Le succès de l'exécution justifie la singularité du dessin. [...] A l'égard de la Musique, nous ne doutons pas que les Connoisseurs n'y trouvent leur compte du côté des Chants & de l'Harmonie: mais, outre ce merite, nous y avons remarqué une méthode qu'on ne sçauroit trop recommander aux musiciens. Mademoiselle Delaguerre forme toujours son dessin de Musique sur le sens ou la passion qui regne dans chaque morceau, & y subordonne l'expression des mots, qu'elle rend fort heureusement, mais qu'elle se garde bien d'outrer". ("Since these cantatas are of a completely new kind, we must devote our attention to them. Until now, it was assumed that only the jocular and fantastic elements of myths are suitable for music. Persons who are accustomed to defending themselves against prejudices believed that one could make a more noble and useful, and nonetheless very agreeable use of music. [...] As far as the music is concerned, we have no doubt that con-

noisseurs will find what their hearts desire in the melodies and harmonies: Alongside this merit, we have also noticed a method, however, that cannot be sufficiently recommended to musicians. Mademoiselle Delaguerre always orientates the course of the music on the meaning or the passion that dominates in each piece and subjugates it to the expression of the words. As successful as she is in this, she also takes great care not to exaggerate it." *Journal des sçavants*, 7 January 1709, p. 13ff.). All these works were, again, dedicated to King Louis XIV.

#### End of concertising activities

Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre finally withdrew from public life around 1715. She earned her livelihood by giving lessons and selling her printed compositions. Nemeitz reported from Paris in 1718: "The concerts given by the famous Mademoiselle La Guerre, who in her youth and thereafter composed so many pieces, / even several operas, / ceased several years ago."

In the year 1721 she composed a "Te Deum" on the occasion of the recovery of King Louis XV from a smallpox illness, appearing once again in the surroundings of the court with it.

In 1726 and 1729 she had her will drawn up. The two versions provide information about her lavish living situation and her possessions. Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre died at the age of 64 on 27 June 1729.

#### Appreciation

Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was surely a gifted instrumentalist. Having been raised in a family of musicians and instrument builders, and later brought up at the court, her talent had the best opportunities for development. Around 1700, women in Paris had extraordinarily good possibilities if they aspired towards a musical career. Alongside singers, it was especially women harpsichordists and organists who could earn a living from their musical activities in Paris. This is the only way to explain how Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre, as wife and widow, was able to continue her musical activities publicly in this way.

In the area of composition, Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre is one of the early representatives of a tradition that integrates Italian stylistic features into French music. This is particularly apparent in her "Préludes non mesurés" of the first volume with harpsichord works. Her cantatas and sonatas, alongside their harmonic richness, are notable for their great regularity of form. In the "Cantates spirituelles" the secco recitative dominates, in

which the rhythm exactly follows the recitation of the text. The arias, composed in da capo form for the most part, bear witness to the richness of the composer's melodic ideas and the successful adaptation of various poetic registers in the music. The "Cantates profanes", on the other hand, are freer and more clearly influenced by Italian music in regard to their melodic, harmonic and rhythmic language.

Both the genre of the sonata and that of the cantata were still relatively new in France at the beginning of the 18th century. Towards the end of the reign of King Louis XIV, the composers at the court concentrated more and more on Philippe d'Orléans, who revealed a marked predilection for Italy. Thus it happened that the sonata and the cantata - both forms that had been cultivated in Italy for over a century - gained more and more ground in Paris. Although Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre belonged to this circle of innovative composers, she nonetheless remained faithful to King Louis XIV and dedicated all her works to him during his lifetime.

In addition, Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre is considered the first French woman opera composer.

#### Reception

During her lifetime, Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was considered a renowned artist. Not least thanks to the continued patronage of King Louis XIV, she was able to continue her career as a "wunderkind" into her adult years without interruption. The concerts that she organised at her house in later years were well known and popular (see Nemeitz).

Titon du Tillet commended her highly, as is seen in the text passages cited above. He placed her at the side of five other musicians: Jean-Baptiste Lully, Michel-Richard Delalande, André Campra, Marin Marais and Philippe Néricault Destouches.

After Jacquet de la Guerre's death, King Louis XV commissioned the mintage of a medal in her honour with the inscription "Aux grands musicien j'ay disputé le prix" ("I have competed for the prize against the great musicians") and her portrait.

German and English sources report of her instrumental and compositional abilities, so that her name was still thoroughly familiar abroad during the mid-18th century as well (see Sir John Hawkins, Gerber or Walther, amongst others).

After a good 100 years of oblivion, Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre counts amongst the first women composers who were rediscovered and researched, and is su-

rely one of the best represented baroque women composers in concert life and on the CD market at present. Compared to this, her abilities as an instrumentalist have rather receded into the background.

## Research

Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was one of the first women composers who was researched in detail. The sources are located in Paris, mostly in the Archives nationales de France and in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Cathérine Cessac has presented important publications about Jacquet de la Guerre.

## Need for Research

The life and compositional oeuvre of Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre have been well researched. It is possible that additional information about her career as a harpsichordist and organist can be gathered from diaries from the court surroundings and aristocratic circles, and that performed works and perhaps additional students can be ascertained.

## Authority control

Virtual International Authority File (VIAF):

<http://viaf.org/viaf/12412219>

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<http://d-nb.info/gnd/119075113>

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