

How the Vielle à roue Was Played in the Concert Spirituel:

As a Pastoral Instrument for *Noëls*

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This paper examines how the vielle à roue (“vielle” or French hurdy-gurdy) was employed as an instrument for performing *Noëls* during Christmas concerts in the Concert Spirituel, a concert series held in 18th-century France. Traditionally regarded as a folk instrument up through the 17th century, the vielle began to attract the attention of the upper classes in the early 18th century following structural improvements. One of the turning points in this transition was the performance of Michel Corrette’s *Noëls* on the vielle and the musette at the Concert Spirituel held on Christmas in 1732—an event marking the beginning of the instrument’s acceptance into court music.

Accordingly, this paper first investigates how the vielle appears in the concert programs of the Concert Spirituel, revealing its highly specific use: it was featured exclusively during Christmas concerts and consistently in tandem with the musette. Next, it explores the emergence of the Noël as an instrumental genre in the early 18th century, demonstrating how bagpipes—particularly those associated with shepherds in the Nativity—came to symbolize the pastoral character of Christmas. Among the many types of bagpipes, the musette was considered appropriate for the nobility due to its refined playing posture. Through an examination of representations and mechanical descriptions of these instruments, and the publication of related repertoire, it is further shown that the vielle, like the musette, was in the process of being reconfigured as an instrument suitable for courtly use.

These findings demonstrate that Christmas concerts in the Concert Spirituel in 1732 represent a significant turning point in the transformation of the vielle’s social and musical status. It was through events such as this that the instrument, once associated with peasants and beggars, came to be embraced by upper-class audiences and through performance in their private settings.