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JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU et al., *Le Devin du Village* (extracts), and other arias, in a *Recueil d'Airs choisis*

In French, illuminated manuscript on paper
[France, probably Paris, after 1752]

18 folios (2 flyleaves + *i*², *ii*⁶ + 2 flyleaves), written in dark brown ink in a fine cursive calligraphic script, text on up to 12 long lines, music on up to 6 staves per page, text, illustrations and music copied in frames composed of double fillets traced in black ink, 11 WATERCOLORS placed at the top or bottom of text and music. Bound in green CONTEMPORARY morocco, gilt dog-tooth roll on boards surrounding floral and double fillets borders, central ornament of massed gilt small tools single gilt fillet on board edges, yellow silk pastedowns, gilt letters, smooth spine in six compartments tooled with fleurons and double fillets, gilt edges. Dimensions 112 x 90 mm.

Diminutive musical manuscript that includes two arias from the *Devin du Village* (the Village Soothsayer), an opera by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, along with other musical pieces by eighteenth-century composers, all illustrated with delightful watercolor drawings. Religious manuscripts in this style are not uncommon but secular musical manuscripts from the period are relatively rare on the market.

PROVENANCE

1. Undoubtedly made in Paris after 1752. The music and libretto for the *Devin du village* ("The Village Sooth-sayer") is signed Jean-Jacques Rousseau; the first performance was given in Fontainebleau on October 18, 1752.
2. Bibliothèque Van der Halle (according to the Firmin-Didot catalogue).
3. Ambroise Firmin-Didot, his bookplate, inside upper cover, *Catalogue illustré des livres précieux, manuscrits et imprimés ...*, Paris, June 1881, no. 37, p. 58.

TEXT

f. 1, Title page: *Recueil d'Airs choisis*;

ff. 2-2v, Air no. 1: "Air du Devin du village"; *Si des galants de la ville / J'eusse écouté les discours* (J.-J. Rousseau, *Le Devin du village. Intermède*, scène II);

f. 3, Air no. 2: "Air tendre"; *Ah! Que vos yeux iris ont de pouvoir...*;

f. 3v-4, Air no. 3: "Ronde de table"; *Ne songeons qu'à rire et boire...*;

ff. 4v-5, Air no. 4: "Rossignol de l'Opéra comique"; *Toi dont le ramage tendre fait le charme de ces bois Rossignol...*;

ff. 5v-6v, Air no. 5: "Les petits riens, Vaudeville"; *Les petits riens enfans d'une aimable folie...*;

ff. 7-7v, Air no. 6: "Le philosophe Vaudeville"; *Je ne forme point de desirs...*;

ff. 8-8v, Air no. 7: "Air du Devin du village"; *Je vais revoir ma charmante maitresse / Adieu châteaux, grandeurs, richesses* (J.J. Rousseau, *Le Devin du village. Intermède*, scène V);

ff. 9-10, Air no. 8: "Ariette nouvelle"; *Livrons nos coeurs a la tendresse...*;

ff. 10v-11, Air no. 9: "Musette du 5e acte du Ballet des sens"; *La paix et l'innocence reglent tous nos plaisirs...*;

f. 11v, Air no. 10: "Ariette"; *Aupres de celle que j'aime, je goute de vrais plaisirs...*;

ff. 12-12v, Air no. 11: "La façon de le faire, Vaudeville"; *Amans qui marchez sur les traces des petits maitres de la Cour...*;

ff. 13-13v, Air no. 12: "Chanson de table en duo"; *Divin Baccus sous ton empire...*;

ff. 14-15, Air no. 13: "La nouvelle rose"; *Tendre fruit des pleurs de l'Aurore...*;

ff. 15v-16, Air no. 14: "Air tendre"; *Venez Amour, venez embellir la Nature...*;

ff. 16v-17v, Air no. 15: " Duo nouveau"; *Regnez, charmante Iris...*

This combination of arias comes mostly from French light opera of the eighteenth century, including two pieces by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). One of the great thinkers of the eighteenth century, Rousseau is generally known as the author of philosophical, political, and pedagogical tracts, as well as literary works. Less well known are his musical activities, although the Rousseau as a philosopher and Rousseau as a musician are interrelated.

He began composing music in the 1730s, but it was not until 1752 that he wrote *Le Devin du village*. It was written during the famous "Querelle des Bouffons" over the relative merits of French and Italian opera. Rousseau took a stand in favor of Italian opera for its more natural

form and its emphasis on melody. *Le Devin de village* tells the story of Colette and Colin, who was unfaithful to her and seeks the aid of a Soothsayer, who advises her to display utter indifference to Colin's advances. At the same time, the Soothsayer tells Colin that Colette has fallen in love with someone else. The trick works, and the lovers are reunited. The opera is the artist synthesis of Rousseau's philosophical views on the superiority of the lower classes and his declared antipathy against the established mannerist French operatic style of Rameau and Lull. It premiered at Fontainebleau before the king in 1752, and Rousseau rewrote pieces of it through the 1770s.

ILLUSTRATION

- f. 2, Profile of a village;
- f. 4, Forget-me-not (?)
- f. 5, Bird on a branch;
- f. 6v, Strawberries;
- f. 8, Profile of a village;
- f. 10, Tulip;
- f. 11, Butterfly;
- f. 13v, Beetle;
- f. 15, Rose and fly;
- f. 16, Carnation;
- f. 17v, Face in stylized acanthus leaves.

The very elegant illustration is by the same artist who painted a liturgical manuscript for Charles, the prince of Soubise (see London, Sotheby's, 15 May, 1997, lot. 107).

LITERATURE

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Le Devin du village, Intermède ...*, Paris, 1753 (first edition);

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Les Consolations des misères de ma vie, ou Recueil d'airs, romances et duos*, Paris, Deroullède, 1781.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Le Devin du Village*, ed. Charlotte Kaufman, A-R editions, 1998. (comprehensive edition, intro., facsimile and score).

Online Resources

J.-J. Rousseau and music

<http://www.osk.3web.ne.jp/~nityshr>