The Leufsta Music Collection: Reflecting the Musical Life of Charles de Geer

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One can safely say that most musicians and singers who use sheet music when making music, professionals as well as amateurs, usually are owners of some kind of private music library. Most of it is acquired to be used, not stored as collection items, but one can assume that the music sheets still have been sorted into groups for various reasons; exercises for warming up, for practising, technically challenging pieces, favourite music, and works collected for reference. A collection of sheet music for private use can serve as a good information source for a musical life, for example, the technical level of the musician, what groups of instruments were played, and the preferred music style.

The numerous music scores included in the Leufsta library can be said to result from the rich musical life led by Charles de Geer (1720–1778) and his closest family. The collection of music scores in the library of Leufstabruk is one of the finer eighteenth-century music collections in Sweden, now named “The Leufsta Music Collection”. It includes several unique printed music sheets, hitherto not available elsewhere. The Leufsta music collection contains chamber music for the home environment, music for social dancing, vocal music and hymns for worship. There is also orchestral music in manuscripts, complete with all the parts, and printed music scores with works for the stage.
Assuming that most of these scores were in use, what can we understand from these sources concerning Charles’s habits as a music lover?

Early Years in Utrecht
Charles de Geer might have had his first musical experiences in his earliest childhood. He was born at Finspång Castle, situated in the province of Östergötland. There was a large library at the castle, including music manuscripts, that had been gathered by several generations of the De Geer family. His parents, Jean Jacques de Geer (1666–1738) and Jacqueline Cornélie van Assendelft (1682–1754), each had their own music collection. In 1723, when Charles was still a small child, his family moved to Utrecht and settled in the Castle of Rijnhuizen. At the age of ten, in 1730, he unexpectedly inherited Leufstabruk and its iron making estate from a childless uncle. From then on, one must assume that he was educated to manage his future role as Swedish landlord and entrepreneur. As a young boy, Charles showed interest in natural sciences and music, and he began creating his own library, including music books.

There is very little concrete evidence, for example receipts, that can be used for a detailed timeline of Charles’s early years. However, there are a few dates that indicate his interest in music. In a letter dated 6/17 July 1736, written by Jean Jacques to his oldest son Louis de Geer (1705–1758), who stayed in Finspång when the family moved to Utrecht, we get to know that Charles, then 16 years of age, played the harpsichord almost as well as his master and that he had learnt to play the cello almost by himself.1 In 1736–37, according to Charles’s account book, several purchases of music books were made through different agents. One of the agents was a man named Fischer. This name probably refers to the local Utrecht organist Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer (c. 1670–1746), a director of the university orchestra in Utrecht at that time.

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1 Swedish National Archives, Leufstaarkivet 106
In the 1730s when Charles grew up, Amsterdam was a European centre of music that attracted musicians from all over the continent, hosting the renowned Italian violin virtuoso Pietro Antonio Locatelli (1695–1764) among others. The Leufsta Music collection includes, for instance, several copied Locatelli minuets in manuscript, and the printed bound score and parts for Locatelli’s violin works opus 4, published in 1735. The lively music life in Amsterdam must have been inspiring, making it easy for Charles to catch up on the music trends of the time.

The preferred repertoire from Charles’s time in Utrecht consists almost only of instrumental music. In 1763, his eldest son Charles de Geer the Politician (1747–1805) wrote a catalogue – Catalogue de livres de musique – of printed and bound music books, mainly from the early years in Utrecht. All the items in the catalogue still remain in the collection.²

At a closer look at the Utrecht part of the Leufsta Music Collection, it can be divided into two smaller groups. Group A, which consists of thirteen music books, includes some of the collection’s oldest music works. The uniform appearance of these music books and the unique serial numbers written with ink on the inside of the hard covers indicate that these thirteen albums are fragments of an originally larger and more complete music collection of at least 149 numbered sets of music books. Charles might have bought these books as one group, from a dealer, in a shop or directly from the former owner. The scores in Group B were printed approximately between 1710–1736. Many of these scores might well have been bought fresh from the press by Charles as a teenager. Some of the books are quite worn, indicating that they were used for playing. Eight of these books have been marked specifically C:D:G:, the initials of Charles de Geer. The repertoire of the music books marked C:D:G: in group B, consists mainly of cello and harpsichord compositions, the instruments Charles played himself.

² Catalogue de livres de musique, Uppsala University Library, Leufsta MS 53
The collection also contains music by unknown local composers, such as Carl Gottfried Geilfus (1704–ca 1740), who was an Utrecht composer and organist employed at the Lutheran church in Utrecht. Geilfus was also a good friend of Fischer, from whom Charles had bought some of his printed music books (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. *Prelude de Mr Geilfus*, probably written down by Charles de Geer. Leufsta Mus. MS. 37. Photo: Uppsala University Library
The Dutch musicologist Albert Dunning (1936–2005) visited Leufstabruk in the 1960s for research on Locatelli’s works within the Leufsta library. According to Dunning, the Leufsta sheet music related to Utrecht has likely been used for the purpose of Charles’s music learning.³

Music Assembled during the Leufstabruk Years

In 1738, after his father died, Charles started his journey to Sweden to take over the iron making estate at Leufstabruk in the province of Uppland. Once in Sweden, Charles was soon elected member of The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. He also led an active life as a natural scientist – he was an entomologist publishing several academic works on the topic. Charles was soon introduced to the royal court in Stockholm, where he came in contact with Swedish court music. It seems that when Charles moved to Sweden, he brought a considerable amount of printed sheet music and manuscripts with him, but after that, he also ceased collecting printed albums to the same extent as in his youth. His music library grew but was mainly expanded with manuscripts.

What was added to the collection in Sweden was a Swedish hymn book, instrumental arrangements of contemporary popular opera arias, a couple of handwritten beginners’ exercises in figured bass, a number of shorter anonymous works and copied works in manuscript by Swedish court musicians such as Ferdinand Zellbell the Elder (1689–1765) and Johan Helmich Roman (1694–1758). Within the collection is a copy of the first edition of Roman’s flute sonatas, published in 1727 and this is one of the first examples of printed Swedish musical works. Charles now also showed an interest in vocal music and opera, mainly through the works of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) within the collection. At the same time, the collection of fine musical instruments at Leufstabruk grew through the years.

Among the manuscripts, a cantata composed for and dedicated to Charles and his wife Catharina Charlotta Ribbing (1720–1787) stands out: H.P. Johnsen’s Church music composed to be played in Leufstabruk church on Easter day 1757. Henrik Philip Johnsen (1717–1779) originally came from Holstein-Gottorp. He was a court organist and later one of the institutors of The Royal Swedish Academy of Music, where he also held a position as librarian (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The manuscript cover of H.P. Johnsen’s Easter cantata for soprano and chamber orchestra dedicated to Charles de Geer and his spouse. Leufsta Mus. MS 5. Photo: Uppsala University Library
The organists employed at Leufstabruk had different tasks. Some of them worked with the iron export administration, and some worked as music teachers for Charles’s children and other children of the high society in the Leufsta village. We do not know much about Johnsen’s activities at Leufstabruk. However, the father of one of his students worked as an organist at Leufstabruk, which might be the reason why many autographs of Johnsen are present in the Leufsta collection.

Very Good Music – and Poor

The printed music sheets in the Leufsta collection have a lot of notes and comments, such as pencil corrections of the figured bass and some personal remarks on the music. Among them, cross-marks or an “NB” (nota bene) is a common sight within the sheets. One handwriting is distinct and occurs on several of the manuscripts. A comparison of Charles’s handwriting in his written material, with the texting found in many of the items of the music collection, indicates that Charles himself copied music and maybe even composed his own music. Charles also carefully wrote registers of the highlights within some of the Händel music books, judging the pieces, for example, “fort bon”, but sometimes also as “médiocre” (Fig. 3 & Fig. 4). These traces of usage from the pencil inscriptions indicate

Figure 3. Les meilleurs Airs de cette Partie sont, les suivant … An example of notes with personal comments on the musical content in one of the Händel music books. Leufsta Mus.tr. 30. Photo: Uppsala University Library
Figure 4. An excerpt from the “Aire by Mr Handel” in Rodelinda, on which Charles De Geer commented “médiocre” (see Fig. 3). Georg Friedrich Händel’s beloved opera Rodelinda had its first performance in London in 1725. This version was published by J.Walsh in 1733 and is an arrangement of the soprano aria *Morrai, si; L’empia tua testa*. Leufsta Mus.tr. 30.

Photo: Uppsala University Library.
that the music sheets were used for playing and not mainly intended for exhibition.

To Conclude
Each time music scores are used, the music will sound differently, depending on parameters such as the tuning, the skill of the musicians, the condition of the instruments and the interpretation. Charles was a devoted amateur musician, eagerly studying the harpsichord and the cello in his youth. We do not know how it sounded when Charles made music, how often he played on his keyboard instruments, what his sense of rhythm was, or what he could do if an instrument was missing for a musical soirée.

However, there are many other things we can conclude from the existing sources. The selection of works in the Leufsta Music Collection reflects both the Dutch and the Swedish musical lives of Charles de Geer. His skills as a copyist of music sheets give us clues about how active he was in studying and performing music. He purchased printed scores and produced his own music sheets by copying. The wear and the traces of usage tell us that parts of the scores were or had been in use. Apparently, as an adult, he did not expand his collection of printed music.

The Leufsta Music manuscripts show great variability of genres, paper quality and style of handwriting. The great variety of musical content and the fashion of the items reflect that the music scores and manuscripts in Charles’s music library had different purposes connected to his musical life. Compared to his youth years in the Netherlands, the scores linked to Charles’s later period in Sweden show a change of taste in repertoire, from instrumental to vocal music. After the move to Sweden, Charles appears to go from being an active collector to a trustee of the printed part of the collection. However, his eldest son, Charles de Geer the Politician, and the later family members, continued to take care of the bound music books and the handwritten sheets, now included within the entailed estate.
The Leufsta Music Collection is today preserved at Uppsala University Library.

List of Suggested Reading