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From the 1690s the wave of Italian influence stemming from the new sonata, concerto, and cantata idioms manifested itself in France in technical virtuosity of a kind not previously seen in French music, as well as in an extension of harmonic vocabulary and new musical forms. While the ‘opposite’ natures of the French and Italian styles were the subject of partisan exchanges on the part of musical amateurs, Couperin was chief among the numerous French composers who saw at once that the combining of the styles held great promise. Indeed, in the preface to the ‘Essai en forme d’Ouverture’ that concludes *L’Apothéose de Lully* the composer represents Apollo convincing Lully and Corelli that the union of the French and Italian styles ‘must result in musical perfection [doit faire la perfection de la Musique]’.

David Tunley’s new book, whose...

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