The present study focuses on the secular cantatas of the early eighteenth-century French composer Nicolas Bernier (1665-1734). Its purpose is to offer an analysis, both literary and musical, of these works and to investigate them in the context of les goûts réunis, the blending of the French and Italian musical styles prevalent at this time. After a biographical sketch, the study will proceed to trace the disparate influences which eventually merge to form the French cantata. This will be followed by an examination and discussion of Bernier’s cantatas themselves, concentrating on questions of text, musical form and structure, instrumentation, ornamentation and various other aspects of performance practice.

The compositions involved, numbering thirty-nine works, were all published during the composer’s lifetime under his supervision. As there are no extant autographs, these original editions, all impeccably printed, formed the basis of this study.

The first four volumes published under the provisions of the privilege du roi granted Bernier in 1703 for his first book of motets, bear no publication dates. All that can be ascertained is that these volumes appeared sometime between 1703 and the publication of Les Nuits de Sceaux in 1715. Books I-IV, VI, and VII bear the title Cantates Françaises ou Musique de Chambre, while Book V is entitled Les Nuits de Sceaux, Concerts de Chambre ou Cantates Françaises en manière de Divertissements.

It is hoped that this study will not only shed light on the music of one particular individual, but will help to illuminate an important French musical genre as well.