



resonus

# sonnerie & other portraits

french baroque  
chamber works

# fantasticus

marais • leclair • francoeur  
du phly • rameau • dornel

## Sonnerie & other portraits

### French Baroque chamber works

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## Fantasticus

Rie Kimura *baroque violin*

Robert Smith *viola da gamba*

Guillermo Brachetta *harpsichord*

About Fantasticus:

*'Its vigorous, dramatic and highly extrovert readings make for compelling listening, demonstrating not only versatility and flexibility but also intimacy and incisiveness'*

The Strad ('The Strad Recommends')

*'This is music-making of maturity, its evident free spirit and exuberance of line allied to control and expressed in impeccable ensemble-playing'*

Gramophone

Marin Marais (1656-1728)

**1. Sonnerie de Ste. Genevieve du Mont de Paris (1723)**

[8:37]

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

**Cinquième concert**

from *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* (1741)

**2. Fugue La Forqueray**

[4:42]

**3. La Cupis**

[5:38]

**4. La Marais**

[2:44]

Marin Marais

from *Pièces de viole* (1701)

**5. Tombeau pour Monsr. de Lully**

[7:01]

François Francoeur (1698-1787)

**Sonate VI**

from *Deuxième Livre de sonates*

à violon seul et basse continue (1730)

**6. Adagio**

[3:41]

**7. Allemande**

[2:00]

**8. Courante**

[2:21]

**9. Sarabande**

[2:05]

**10. Rondeau**

[5:12]

Jean-Marie Leclair (1697-1764)

**Sonata VIII**

from *12 Sonatas*, Op. 2 (1728)

**11. Adagio**

[2:06]

**12. Allegro**

[2:12]

**13. Sarabanda**

[2:34]

**14. Allegro assai**

[2:50]

Jacques Du Phly (1715-1789)

from *Troisième livre de pièces de clavecin* (1756)

**15. La Forqueray**

[5:56]

Louis-Antoine Dornel (c.1680-c.1756)

**Sonate IV**

from *Sonates*, Op. 2 (1711)

**16. Prelude**

[1:48]

**17. Allemande**

[2:01]

**18. Lentement**

[2:06]

**19. Vivement et marqué**

[1:42]

**20. Chaconne**

[3:37]

Total playing time

[71:06]



Fantasticus

### Sonnerie: French Baroque Portraits

In one of the sharpest passages of Molière's comedy of manners *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659), the masquerading Marquis de Mascarille discusses the most fashionable literary genres of the day with the pretentious young ladies Magdelon and Cathos. He claims, rather extravagantly, that nearly 2000 of his own sonnets, epigrams and madrigals are in circulation in Paris 'without counting the riddles and portraits'. Cathos says she's 'awfully fond of riddles', while Magdelon suddenly finds she absolutely 'dotes upon portraits' and can 'think of nothing more gallant'. Mascarille, though, insists upon the distinction between lightweight *galanteries* like riddles and the rather more demanding task of penning portraits which, he swears, is truly 'difficult and calls for penetrating wit'.

There were few with more probing insight than the philosopher and moralist Jean de La Bruyère who made his name with the piercing portraits of *Les Caractères* (1688). Yet they proved too thinly-disguised and unflattering for comfort, and La Bruyère paid a high price for his wit and candour. Musicians, though, showed more tact. From the second decade of the eighteenth century composers began to populate their publications with musical portraits,

commemorative pieces and *pièces de hommage* which flattered and celebrated their subjects, leaving deeper meanings to the imagination and discretion of the listener.

Most of the portraits contained in the four harpsichord books of Jacques Du Phly (1715-1789) are of well-known aristocrats, personalities and musicians. *La Forqueray* was published in the *Troisième livre de pièces de clavecin* (1756) and honours Antoine Forqueray, one of the greatest viol players of the age, whose works were published posthumously in 1747 by his similarly gifted son, Jean-Baptiste. Father and son were infamously at odds. Forqueray *le père* scandalously neglected his family and had his son imprisoned and banished from the country; his wife, who left him five times, pronounced him 'hot headed'. Du Phly doesn't take sides, nor even hint at the turbulence of his subject's life; his portrait is a serious celebration of Forqueray's virtuosity in the form of a sombre *rondeau* which explores the rich, lower register of the harpsichord, in imitation of the bass-viol.

Louis-Antoine Dornel (c.1680-c.1756) was one of many other composers who honoured Forqueray. The fourth of his *Sonates* for violin Op. 2 (1711) is entitled *La Forcroy*, and while there's no attempt at a character

sketch or an evocation of Forqueray's musical style, Dornel does write an independent part for the viol in the third and fourth movements. Such moments of freedom for the viol, temporarily liberated from its bass line duties, are often found in solo sonatas of the time, creating proto-trio sonatas with the viol acting as a fleeting second melody instrument. Stylistically, it's clear that Dornel had been listening to the brand-new sonatas of Corelli. The fourth movement, with its simple fugal banter between voices and passages of sonorous parallel motion, is thoroughly Italian in spirit. But the finale returns flamboyantly to France with its slow-burn 'Chaconne' which, at its climax, allows the viol (and the left hand of the harpsichord) a final moment in the limelight, with a bass line which scampers all the way to the final double bar.

From chamber music to opera, variations over a repeating bass or harmonic sequence – chaconnes and passacaglias – were fundamental to the French Baroque style. In his popular *Sonnerie de Ste Geneviève du Mont de Paris* (1723) Marin Marais hints at the chaconne in his use of triple-time ostinato patterns, but actually the underpinning three-note bass figure is really intended to imitate the peeling bells of St Geneviève. But such a repetitious

device had to be balanced by greater textural interest in the music. As the leading viol virtuoso of his generation, Marais ensured that his instrument was kept busy mediating between the continuo and violin parts – doubling and enhancing the bass with improvisational diminutions, and consorting (and occasionally even vying) with the top line.

Many of Marais' pieces offer more profound insights. From the second third of the seventeenth century, French lutenists began the tradition of writing musical portraits honouring the revered dead. Later taken up by harpsichordists and viol players, Marais erected two of these *tombeaux* to his former teachers – Sainte-Columbe and Jean-Baptiste Lully. The *Tombeau pour Monsr. de Lully*, from the second volume of Marais' *Pièces de viole* (1701), is expressively fluid, moving rapidly between weeping phrases, chromatic inflections and dramatic outbursts which not only exploit the dark sonorities of the viol, but also reach up into the throaty chest-voice and searing treble registers of the instrument. While the black ink of melancholy suffuses the whole, it is nevertheless organised with the authority and rhetorical eloquence of a passionate funeral oration.

The elevated language of the *tombeaux*

echoed well beyond the graveyard. François Francoeur (1698-1789) mirrored the same fluidity of emotion in the slow movements of his more searching sonatas. The opening 'Adagio' of *Sonate VI*, from his second book of violin sonatas of c.1730, runs the gamut of grief with some of the same gestures employed by Marais and Jean-Fery Rebel in their celebrated *tombeaux* for Lully. Later in the sonata Francoeur lightens the mood with a carefree 'Courante', a technically more ambitious 'Allemande', and an exquisitely delicate 'Sarabande'. He infuses the final 'Rondeau' with plenty of challenges for the violin, which must negotiate wide leaps and rapid string crossings, and bring an almost orchestral sense of drama to the final couplet, before dissolving into a slow, written-out cadenza which returns us beautifully to the final statement of the insinuatingly memorable *rondeau*.

Francoeur may never have dedicated a sonata to Lully, but long after his death in 1687, Francoeur's stage works still proudly preserved Lully's memory in style and form. Musicians were split on the matter: there were those who remained stubbornly faithful to the pure Frenchness of the Lullian model, while others, like François Couperin and Jean-Marie Leclair (1697-1764), strove for *les goûts réunis* (the 'reunion of tastes'), a more euro-

friendly approach uniting the best of French and Italian styles. In his second book of violin sonatas of 1728 Leclair speaks with a strong Corellian accent, but it isn't until *Sonata VIII* – an unexpected trio sonata – that we witness the *goûts réunis* in action. Outwardly Leclair follows Corelli's typical four-movement *da chiesa* design, alternating slow and fast movements, with a fugue in second position and a profusion of sequences and euphonious parallel movement. But what would have surprised Corelli was Leclair's decision to partner the violin with a fully independent part for the viol. Italian trio sonatas generally sported a pair of violins over a figured bass, but Leclair follows his French nose for richer textures.

Jean-Philippe Rameau was a mature composer of 58 when he came to write his first and only set of chamber music – the *Pièces de clavecin en concerts*. By 1741 Rameau had already published his solo harpsichord music and had astonished the Parisian public with three great operas; now he brought all his accumulated experience to bear on a fledgling form which was taking France by storm – the accompanied sonata. In the preface to the *Pièces ... en concerts*, Rameau clearly aligns himself with this 'much-appreciated trend', and without naming him explicitly, is nevertheless clear

that his inspiration is Mondonville's popular *Pieces de clavecin en sonates* Op. 3 of 1734.

The real novelty of the French 'accompanied sonata' was that it had a fully written-out harpsichord part, unlike the Italian variety, which had a simple figured bass. French and Italian forms thus had very different centres of gravity: in the Italian trio sonata the harpsichord realises the harmony of the bass line to provide an accompaniment for the two melody instruments, whereas in the French form it's the melody instruments which, to a greater or lesser extent, accompany the keyboard. Indeed, so central was the harpsichord to Rameau's design that he even claimed these pieces could be played without their accompanying string parts, leaving 'nothing to be desired'. But listening closely to the *Cinquième concert*, we can clearly hear that this was the businessman rather than the composer talking.

Rameau was not a composer who liked to leave things to chance. His *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* were novel and challenging, and he thought players might appreciate a word or two of advice. He starts by allaying any fears about instrumentation. The minimum requirement is a harpsichord, but ideally the keyboard player should be joined by a viola da gamba, or if that was difficult, he'd taken the

precaution of arranging the part for a violin. The other melody instrument could just as easily be a violin as a flute. As for the manner of performance, Rameau recommended that the 'violin and viol must just lend themselves to the harpsichord'. He urged the string players to 'distinguish between what is only accompaniment and what is thematic. The accompaniment', he said, 'must be played even more softly'.

The composer's parting words to performers back in 1741 included an appeal to their inner musicianship. 'By grasping the spirit of each of my pieces properly, the whole will fall perfectly into place'. But how much of this 'spirit' did Rameau give away in the titles of these pieces? In fact, he freely admitted that many of his titles were recommended by 'persons of taste and skill', but only after the music had actually been composed. Even so, certain characteristic features must have suggested a link between the technically ambitious 'La Forqueray' and the viol playing of the young Jean-Baptiste Forqueray, with whom Rameau was on friendly terms; similarly, the ebullient 'La Marais', with one of the lively children of the great violist Marin Marais. But the most intriguing personality is 'La Cupis' – perhaps the celebrated dancer Marie-Anne Cupis (popularly known as 'La Camargo') who took part in the première

of Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* in 1733, or possibly her young brother, François, who had a troubled early life. Here Rameau exercises some of that 'penetrating wit' and insight of which Molière's *Marquis de Mascarille* spoke. But the intriguing air of melancholy which hovers so tenderly over 'La Cupis' ultimately remains unexplained, its lingering beauty self-sufficient testament to the enduring charms of the French musical portrait.

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*Dr Simon Heighes is a musicologist, critic and broadcaster with a particular interest in the music of the late Baroque and early Classical periods.*



## **Fantasticus**

Rie Kimura *baroque violin*

Robert Smith *viola da gamba*

Guillermo Brachetta *harpsichord*

Fantasticus is an ensemble based in the Netherlands. Their debut recording for Resonus Classics in 2012 was critically acclaimed receiving a 'Strad Recommends' from The Strad Magazine and glowing reviews across the music press.

The three members have a wealth of experience on stage, are prize winners of important early music competitions (Bruges, Van Wassenaer, Premio Bonporti) and play with the most established baroque orchestras including the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, De Nederlandse Bachvereniging and Bach Collegium Japan.

The combination of violin, viola da gamba and harpsichord was very popular during the whole Baroque period and this allows Fantasticus to bring consistently varied programmes to their audiences.

Inspired by the gloriously virtuosic music from the end of the 17th century, from which the name 'Stylus Fantasticus' came, the aim of the ensemble is to recreate repertoire from the early seicento until

the late Baroque searching and exploring the extravagance that flourished when composers and instrumentalists dared to traverse the established limits of the normal.

The members all came to the Netherlands to profit from the fertile early music scene. They spent time learning from the pioneers of the early music movement at the conservatoires of The Hague and Amsterdam before themselves becoming a part of the thriving Baroque music life in Holland.

As individuals and as an ensemble, their music takes them all over the Netherlands and indeed all over the world.

[www.fantasticus.nl](http://www.fantasticus.nl)





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