

A detailed still life painting. In the foreground, a large, textured, light-colored shell is partially filled with flowers. To its right, several other shells of various shapes and colors (dark, spotted, and conical) are scattered on a dark surface. A thin, green stem with several blue flowers and buds arches across the middle ground. In the background, a butterfly with orange and black wings is perched on a stem. The overall composition is rich and detailed, with a muted, earthy background.

La Gracieuse

Pièces de Viole by Marin Marais

Robert Smith *viola da gamba*

Israel Golani *Baroque guitar & theorbo*

Joshua Cheatham *viola da gamba*

Olivier Fortin *harpsichord*

Marin Marais (1656–1728)

La Gracieuse: Pièces de Viole

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Israel Golani *theorbo & Baroque guitar*

Joshua Cheatham *viola da gamba*

Olivier Fortin *harpsichord*

Adrián Rodríguez Van der Spoel *percussion*

Instruments:

Viola da gamba: Colichon model, Pierre Bohr

Baroque guitar: After Giovanni Tessler, Ivo Magherini

Theorbo: After seventeenth century Italian models, Klaus Jacobsen

Viola da gamba: Barack Norman model, François Bodart

Harpsichord: Flemish, Thomas Power

About Robert Smith:

'Smith masterfully blends introspective sonorities with bold virtuosity, capturing the very essence of the fantasia genre'

Early Music

'Whatever the mood, this is playing of exceptional quality. Robert Smith navigates each piece with clear-eyed musicality, always weaving a beautifully sonorous, coherent line'

The Observer

Suite in A major

1. Prélude	[2:31]
2. Boutade	[1:39]
3. La Gracieuse	[3:10]
4. Gigue à l'anglaise	[1:57]
5. Rondeau 'moitié pincé'	[1:38]
6. Fantaisie	[5:07]

Suite in E minor

7. Prélude	[2:44]
8. Fantaisie	[0:58]
9. Sarabande à l'espagnol	[2:39]
10. La Matelotte	[1:35]
11. Rondeau paysan	[1:39]
12. La Biscayenne (Tambourin)	[2:07]
13. Fugue gaie	[2:47]

Suite in G minor

14. Prélude	[2:20]
15. Caprice	[0:50]
16. Sarabande	[3:35]
17. Gigue La Chicane	[2:08]
18. Plainte	[3:16]
19. Menuet fantasque	[2:02]
20. Fugue gaye	[1:41]
21. La Georgienne dite la Maupertuy	[2:10]
22. Fugue gaye (Double)	[1:49]

Suite in F-sharp minor

23. Prélude	[3:21]
24. Allemande	[2:56]
25. Courante	[1:31]
26. Sarabande	[2:17]
27. Gigue	[2:05]
28. Menuet	[1:18]
29. Rondeau	[2:10]

Total playing time [66:13]



Marin Marais by André Bouys (1704)

Holding a passion for the music of Marin Marais is one thing, and deciding which handful of his 600 *Pièces de viole* to record on an album is quite another. I started by playing twice through all of Marais' five volumes of music for viol and basso continuo from start to finish. This in itself was quite a marathon but it was also a journey of discovery. It was surprising how clear it was to feel in my own fingers how Marais' writing for the viol changed from when he was thirty years old, to when he was forty-five, fifty-five, sixty-one and sixty-nine years old – his respective age when each of his five books were published. One can feel the vigour and impatience of youth in the earlier books from someone who was not afraid to take a difficult path in order to prove his skill. And how interesting that, in the later books, the increasingly wise composer appears to succeed in creating sublime musical results with much less effort. I got the feeling that somewhere along the line Marais achieved a complete understanding (an enlightenment perhaps?) of how the viol works.

Through this survey of Marais' output for solo viol I was able to put together a programme that both reflects his musical development and sheds light on some of his hitherto less well-known compositions. There are a number of much-loved pieces

by Marais (thanks not in the least to the film *Tous les Matins du Monde*) and they really do deserve their place in the hearts of viol players. However, I think it vital to keep looking for the forgotten gems lurking amongst the pages of Marais' thick tomes of viol music since there is so much to learn and be enjoyed from all of his music.

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La Gracieuse: Pièces de Viole by Marin Marais

As a central figure in the French school of viol playing in the eighteenth century, Marin Marais holds a special place in the pantheon of French baroque composers. His name now – as was the case during his lifetime – is virtually synonymous with the bass viol. Together with his younger contemporary, Antoine Forquerey, Marais represented the pinnacle of the French school of viol playing, as the instrument was gradually giving way to Italian imports in form of the violin family. In fact, only twelve years after Marais' death, in 1740, the viol was already losing the battle, so much so that a French abbé by the name of Hubert le Blanc deemed it necessary to publish a treatise (*Défense de la basse de viole contre les entreprises du violon et les prétentions du violoncelle*) defending the viol 'against the enterprises of the violin

and the pretensions of the cello! Comparing the viol playing of le Père Marais, with that of Forcroi [Forqueray] le Père, le Blanc concluded that Marais 'played like an angel, and the other played like a devil.' (Both composers fathered viol player sons who also became famous: Roland Marais and Jean-Baptiste Forqueray.)

Not much is known about the personal life of Marin Marais. Born in Paris in 1656, Marais lived all his life in that city and died there in 1728. As a young boy, he entered the choir school of the St Germain-l'Auxerrois parish, where he studied with François Chaperon. According to *Le parnasse françois* (1732), the biographical chronicle of French artists and poets by Évrard Tillet, Marin Marais studied the viol with Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe, the greatest viol player at the time who has been credited with adding the seventh and lowest string to the bass viol. As Tillet du Tillet narrates, Marais' studies with Sainte-Colombe did not last long. Apparently jealous of his talented student's advances in viol playing and fearing Marais surpassing him, Sainte-Colombe dismissed his student after half a year on the grounds that he did not have anything new to teach the young boy. As a result, Tillet tells us, Marais used to hide under his master's summertime pavilion,

in order to profit from the master's playing. This did not last long as Marais was discovered by Sainte-Colombe and barred from his summer residence. Regardless of the veracity of this anecdote, the two viol players evidently held each other in high esteem. Upon Sainte-Colombe's death in 1700, Marais published his *Tombeau pour Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe* (1701) as a tribute to his revered master.

Around 1675, Marais joined the orchestra of the Paris Opéra as a viol player. He thus came under the tutelage of the greatest composer of the period in France, Jean-Baptiste Lully. Thanks in part to Lully's support, Marais rapidly made headway in his career, earning the title of *ordinaire de la musique de la chambre du roi* in 1679. Having studied composition under Lully, Marais published his first collection of pieces for viol in 1686 and dedicated it to Lully. After Lully's death in 1687, Marais published four *tragédies en musique* in the style of Lully. Subsequent to the failure of his *Sémélé*, performed in 1709, Marais gradually withdrew from public life while continuing his publishing activities. He retired from his court activities in 1725 and died three years later on August 15, 1728.

Hailed as 'an incomparable French viol player



in Paris, whose works are well-known all over Europe' in Johann Gottfried Walther's *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1732), Marais is considered the most prolific composer of viol music. Between 1686 and 1725, he published a total of five books (*livres*) of pieces for one, two, and three bass viols, known as *Pièces de violes*. (Of the 598 pieces contained in these five volumes, 559 are for solo viol and continuo.) All five collections were published in part-books and included both pieces with traditional suite titles (prelude, allemande, gigue, etc.) and *pièces de caractère* ('Le Labyrinthe', 'L'Arabesque', 'Les Voix Humaines', etc.). Each of the five books of solo parts (and the *basse continue* part to the first book) is supplemented with a prefatory note (*avertissement*) in which Marais explains the notational peculiarities employed by him as well as matters of performance practice.

The individual pieces of all the books are arranged into suites according to key. Marais' suites often depart from the usual order of suite movements (allemande, courante, sarabande, gigue which had been established decades before him by Froberger) generally with a greater number of pieces than is practical to perform in one sitting. This leaves room for the player to arrange the pieces in

different orders and create custom-made suites. The four suites recorded here present different stages of Marais' compositional development. The suites are arranged according to tonality (A major, E minor, G minor, and F-sharp minor) and contain pieces from all five *livres*. Marais' compositional style evolves noticeably from the early books to the later ones. His first two volumes are characterized by dense textures and virtuosic writing often involving double stops and chords, whereas the later suites are technically much more efficient and feature more melodic writing in both the viol and continuo parts.

Fifteen years after the first book, Marais published his second book of viol pieces in 1701, a volume dedicated to the music-loving Duke of Orléans.

The **Suite in A major** contains six pieces from the second book, preceded by a prelude borrowed from book four. In this suite, the frolicking 'Boutade' is balanced by the tenderness of 'La Gracieuse'. Similarly, the brief and delightful interplay of *pizzicato* and *arco* passages in the 'Rondeau' comes in contrast to the varied texture of the unusually lengthy 'Fantaisie'. Marais' compositional competence shines through in 'Fantaisie' more than

any other piece on this recording. In line with the freedom implied with the title of the piece, the movement's formal structure blends aspects of fugue and passacaglia. The opening A major section exhibits almost all characteristics of a fugue, but soon the dark clouds cast by the A minor section yank the music towards a passacaglia with an ostinato lament bass in regular four-bar units. Although the return of A major breaks away with the ostinato bass after a while, the regular four-bar phrase structure remains almost intact to the end. In this piece, Marais strikes an admirable balance between music of the past and the present – deploying the harmonic idiom of the early eighteenth-century while tipping his hat to the old masters of the seventeenth century by using their favourite form.

The most diverse and pedagogically-oriented of all the books, the fourth book was published in 1717, without a dedication. The book is divided into three parts: the first (from which most of the E minor suite is taken) for 'those who prefer easy, singing pieces with few chords to difficult ones'; the second for 'those who are advanced on the viol...who do not like easy pieces'; and the third consisting of pieces for three viols, which as Marais remarks, was unprecedented in France.

The **Suite in E minor** is comprised mostly of pieces from the fourth book but finishes with a daunting 'Fugue gaie' from the second book – typical of the younger Marais for its density and technical difficulty. Although Marais probably never travelled outside of his milieu in Paris, the suite is replete with references to foreign places and people of the country: 'Sarabande a l'espagnol, Rondeau paysan' (peasant rondo), 'La Matelotte' (a dance originating from French sailor culture), and 'La Biscayenne' (a tambourin dance traditionally featuring a prominent drum in duple time and referring to Biscay, a historical territory of the Basque region) all invoke aspects of plebeian life outside of Marais' familiar circle.

Dedicated amicably to 'the public,' the third book was published in 1711. As Marais points out in his preface, the abundance of short and easy pieces in this volume made it suitable for amateurs. It is this collection from which the major part of the **Suite in G minor** is derived. The lament bass with which the 'Prélude' begins, imparts a lugubrious affect to the movement, indeed to the whole suite. The rhythmic vigour and contrapuntal finesse of 'Gigue La Chicane' reflects its nickname – an eighteenth-century term for a dispute or argument still used in modern



day Quebec. An elegant and fanciful 'Menuet fantasque' is then followed by its 'Double' – a typically French designation for highly ornamented reprises. Harmonically as well as contrapuntally complex and experimental, the 'Fugue gaye' is perhaps the gayest display of virtuosity in this suite. The character piece 'La Georgienne dite la Maupertuy', from the fifth book, gives us some respite between the fugue and its 'Double'. In this case the solo part of the fugue is left unchanged and the variations are applied, rather generously, to the furious bass part.

The viol part of the first book was published in 1686. The *basse continue* part, however, was only published three years later in 1689. In addition to the bass parts to the pieces in the first book, the part-book included ten new works in the appendix, printed unusually in score format. The **Suite in F-sharp minor** is found in this appendix and is the only suite on this recording performed in its entirety—partly possible due to its relatively compact length. Marais, as we know, dedicated the first book of his viol pieces to Lully and seems to pay tribute to his late master in this suite. The 'Prélude' is composed in the manner of Lully's so-called 'French overtures', while the following movements, bearing the most typical

dance titles, hark back to tradition. Marais' character pieces that prevail in his later volumes of viol works are conspicuously absent in this suite.

Perhaps nothing concludes a discussion of Marais' viol works better than Titon du Tillet's accolade of the composer: 'one can say that Marais has taken the viol to its highest degree of perfection, and that he is the first to make known all its extent and beauty by the numerous excellent pieces he has composed on this instrument, and by the admirable manner in which he performed them.'

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Robert Smith (viola da gamba)

Robert Smith is a viola da gamba and cello player from Yorkshire in the north of England. Since winning the Bach-Abel Viola da Gamba Competition in Köthen in 2012 Robert's life as a basso-continuo player and soloist has taken him down many interesting and varied paths. He has regularly criss-crossed Europe from his home in Amsterdam to play Baroque music with many leading ensembles and orchestras. Robert is a member of the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and with his own ensemble Fantasticus he has recorded critically acclaimed recordings for Resonus Classics.

In music as in life Robert likes to get off the beaten path. His albums often feature previously unrecorded repertoire such as the lyra-viol music on *Tickle the Minikin* and the virtuoso Jenkins duets, with his former teacher Paolo Pandolfo, on *The Excellency of Hand*. He enjoys exploring different genres of music and working with artists from other disciplines. This has led to interesting performances such as playing Metallica songs for death-defying acrobats in historical circus tents.

As a solo player Robert has had live concerts

broadcast by BBC Radio 3, Deutschlandfunk Kultur and worked as a soloist for the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. In 2017 Robert released one of the first ever recordings of Telemann's newly discovered Fantasias for solo viola da gamba, which *The Observer* reviewed as 'playing of exceptional quality'.

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Photography: Alex Giacomelli

Joshua Cheatham (viola da gamba)

From the treble viol to the 'virole de gamboes of extraordinarie greatnesse', Joshua Cheatham performs the challenging seventeenth and eighteenth century repertoire shared by both melody and bass instruments. Whether in the viol consort literature, the virtuoso works for solo viola da gamba of Marais, Forqueray and Bach, or orchestral double bass playing, he has become a welcome member of the chamber music and orchestral scene in Europe. He is the recipient of the 2006 Capriccio Stravagante Prize, founded in 1998 to recognize and support exceptional individuality and talent in the fields of Renaissance and Baroque music.

Olivier Fortin (harpsichord)

Olivier Fortin is a harpsichordist in demand as a soloist and chamber musician, touring and recording throughout the world with groups such as Ensemble Masques, Capriccio Stravagante and Tafelmusik. He performs together with Skip Sempé and Pierre Hantai in programmes of music for two and three harpsichords. Olivier Fortin is the founder and director of the Ensemble Masques. In 1997 he was awarded top prizes at the Montreal Bach Competition and the Bruges Festival. He

taught harpsichord and chamber music at the Conservatoire de Musique de Québec, and currently teaches at the Tafelmusik Summer Institute in Toronto.

Israel Golani (theorbo & Baroque guitar)

Since graduating cum laude in Musicology at Tel-Aviv University, Israel Golani has become one of Europe's most acclaimed lute, baroque guitar and theorbo players. His skills as a continuo player have led to performances with many leading European orchestras, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, MusicAeterna and B'Rock. Israel has featured on recordings of both Renaissance as well as Baroque repertoire. His debut solo album, *Raclerie Universelle*, was released in 2013 and was a result of a passion for seventeenth-century French guitar repertoire. More recently Israel has collaborated with renowned conductor Teodor Currentzis in creating basso-continuo accompaniments for Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *La Clemenza di Tito*.

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