

NICOLAS ALTSTAEDT, cello
THOMAS DUNFORD, lute

MARIN MARAIS (1656-1728)
Pièces de viole Book IV No. 82
La Rêveuse
(approx. 4 minutes)

Nicolas Altstaedt
Thomas Dunford

ANTOINE FORQUERAY (1672-1745)
Suite No. 2 in G major
La Leclair
(approx. 3 minutes)

Nicolas Altstaedt
Thomas Dunford

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)
Cello Suite No. 1 in G major BWV 1007
Prelude – Allemande – Courante (arr. T. Dunford)
(approx. 9 minutes)

Thomas Dunford

MARIN MARAIS (1656-1728)
Pièces de viole Book IV No. 61
Fête champêtre
(approx. 6 minutes)

Nicolas Altstaedt
Thomas Dunford

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)
Cello Suite No. 1 in G major BWV 1007
Sarabande – Menuet I – Menuet II – Gigue (arr. T. Dunford)
(approx. 8 minutes)

Thomas Dunford

MARIN MARAIS (1656-1728)
Pièces de viole Book IV No. 87
Le Badinage
Pièces de viole Book II No. 20
Couplets de Folies
(approx. 23 minutes)

Nicolas Altstaedt
Thomas Dunford

— INTERMISSION —

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)
Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor BWV 1011

Nicolas Altstaedt

Prélude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande
Gavotte I – Gavotte II – Gigue
(approx. 25 minutes)

HENRI DUPARC (1848–1933)

Sonata in A minor

Lento

(approx. 2 minutes)

Nicolas Altstaedt

Thomas Dunford

ANTOINE FORQUERAY (1672–1745)

Suite No. 2 in G major

La Buisson

(approx. 5 minutes)

Nicolas Altstaedt

Thomas Dunford

MARIN MARAIS (1656–1728)

Pièces de viole Book II No. 63

Les voix humaines

Pièces de viole Book III No. 13

Grand Ballet

Pièces de viole Book IV No. 64

Le Tourbillon

(approx. 11 minutes)

Nicolas Altstaedt

Thomas Dunford

The program of this afternoon's recital is dominated by the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and two Baroque composers active at the French court: Marin Marais and Antoine Forqueray.

Composer and virtuoso instrumentalist **Marin Marais** is a towering figure in the world of early music. From his appointment as a house musician at the court of Louis XIV in 1679, and for almost a half-century afterwards, he was known as the undisputed master and pre-eminent French exponent of his chosen instrument, the *viola da gamba* (or simply "viol"), an instrument much in favour in 17th-century France.

The viols, which came in various sizes from treble to bass, were fretted stringed instruments played with a bow and held vertically, either in the lap or between the legs (hence *da gamba*). By the mid-18th century, the viols had been replaced by the *un*-fretted violin family — violin, viola, cello and double bass — instruments more suitable for use in the large halls of the 18th century's burgeoning concert life because of their more piercing tone and their perceived ability to imitate the warmth of the human voice.

Marais' five volumes of *Pièces de viole* published between 1686 and 1725 form the core of the repertory for viols. Each volume is a loose collection of dance

suites for viol and continuo featuring the canonical genres of allemande, courante, sarabande and gigue but also a significant number of “character pieces” with fanciful titles describing a person or an imagined scene.

The French, you see, have always wanted to interpret instrumental music as *narration* or *description*, as a soundtrack to something they can see in their mind’s eye. (Think: Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*, Paul Dukas’ *Sorcerer’s Apprentice* or even the bird songs of Olivier Messiaën). If it’s not a dance they can imagined performed, then they want to hear it as a storyline or an unfolding drama.

Marais even indulged this tendency to the extreme in his *Tableau de l’opération de la Taille*, a chamber trio evoking a surgical operation to remove bladder stones, complete with the shrieks of the patient — a work I believe I can speak for many in thanking our performers for *not* including on this afternoon’s program.

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Marin Marais La Rêveuse

Marais’ *La Rêveuse* (The Dreaming Girl) is a rondo, with an opening refrain of rather morose character



that alternates with intervening episodes that become ever more lively as the work progresses. The title is enigmatic because, like many of these fanciful titles, we don’t know who the subject being referred to actually is.

We could do worse, however, than to recall the scene from the film *Tous les matins du monde* (1991) in which the composer (played by Gérard Depardieu) is called to the home of Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe, his first viol teacher, and is asked by Sainte-Colombe’s daughter Madeleine, Marais’ former lover, to hear once more before she dies the piece he wrote for her, *La Rêveuse* (performed in the soundtrack by early music specialist Jordi Savall).

Antoine Forqueray La Leclair

The musician who replaced Marais as the leading figure in viol-playing during the early reign of Louis XV was **Antoine Forqueray**, a musician of fiery temperament whose many legal disputes with his own family left him leading a disorganized professional life.

Forqueray represented a new direction in music for the viol: one that privileged the more brilliant upper register of the instrument, whereas Marais sought to exploit the resonance of the viol's lower regions. A characteristic of this new style was Forqueray's adoption of the brilliant passagework and technical acrobatics of recent violin scores from Vivaldi and other Italian composers.

A good example of this new, strikingly dramatic style of writing is *La Leclair*, a name likely given to the piece by the composer's son Jean-Baptiste Forqueray (1699–1782) who published his father's works posthumously in 1747. By so doing he was associating his father with the popularity and accomplishments of Jean-Marie Leclair (1697–1764), the founder of the French school of violin-playing.



In this exuberant, toe-tapping piece, the accent is on virtuoso display, conveyed through exhilarating run-up gestures and dazzling scale passages.

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Johann Sebastian Bach

Cello Suite No. 1 in G major BWV 1007

Prelude – Allemande – Courante (arr. T. Dunford)

Bach's cello suites are in some ways the stylistic "cousins" of the viol and lute music coming out of the French court. This is because writing for a single-line melodic instrument like the cello in a polyphonic age like that of the Baroque was a tricky business. The go-to solution for this conundrum was the so-called *style brisé* or "broken style," a compositional texture popularized in 17th-century French lute music and therefore perfectly idiomatic for performance on that instrument.

In the *style brisé*, the composer would simply *imply* what he wanted the listener to hear by feeding the harmonies out piecemeal in wide-ranging textures of arpeggiated chords and running figures that emphasized the fundamental notes in the harmony. As a result, one actually begins to hear a multi-voiced harmonic and even contrapuntal structure beneath all the fancy filigree, much in the way that the fluttering veils of ecdysiast Gypsy Rose Lee suggested far more than the eyes of her audience were actually seeing.

This technique is masterfully applied in Bach's Six Suites for Solo Cello (ca. 1720). The *Suite No. 1 in G major BWV 1007* opens with "pattern" prelude that repeats the same rhythmic and motivic figure throughout. This piece has almost become synonymous with Baroque cello music itself.

Prélude.



Its nobility of sentiment far transcends what one might expect to admire in a simple repetitive pattern of broken chord figures and connecting scales. The result is a rocking, undulating pattern of tones that evokes a sense of being at peace with the world.

The *Allemande* moves along a similar sequence of steady sixteenths,

Allemande.



although here the tempo feels slower and more dignified because the texture is dominated by runs rather than arpeggios.

The *Courante* (French for "running") establishes a more overtly dance-like rhythm

Courante.



with its regular pattern of rhythmic and melodic sequences with large leaps balancing its scalar running figures.

Marin Marais

Fête champêtre

This rondeau evokes the unbuttoned merriment of a village celebration with rollicking dance rhythms



and even a *musette* towards the end with a growling drone tone in the bass that imitates the sounds of the kind of pipes played in the countryside.

Johann Sebastian Bach (arr. T. Dunford)

Cello Suite No. 1 in G major BWV 1007

Sarabande – Menuet I – Menuet II – Gigue

Thomas Dunford completes his performance of Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G major in his own arrangement with the remaining dances, the Sarabande, two Minuets and the Gigue finale.

The grave dignity of the **Sarabande** is communicated through the use of multiple-stop chords



that highlight this dance's typical emphasis on the second beat of the bar.

Between the sarabande and the gigue Bach inserts a pair of minuets of contrasting characters. The sprightly rhythms of **Minuet I**



remind us that the minuet had its origins in a quick dance rather than the stately tempo we have come to associate with a dance popular at court.

Minuet II is the only dance in the suite not in G major.



Bach moves it to D minor for a change to a darker tone colour, but that

out this section of *galanteries* (optional extra dance movements) in the same mood as it began.

The concluding *Gigue* is made toe-tapping by its almost constant stream of triplets in the melodic line,



enlivened every once in a while by a short “skip” in 16ths.

Marin Marais Le Badinage

We are left guessing as to what the title of Marais’ *Le Badinage* actually refers to, but we may safely assume that it is some kind of playful conversation roughly equivalent to “banter.”



One interpretation of this score might see the opening two quarter notes devolving into mindless “chatter” in the following 8th notes as the key pictorial element here. In such a reading, the 16th notes in the final section



can only be thought of as the blathering musings of a motor-mouth.

Marin Marais Couplets de Folies

Marais crowns the opening Suite in D minor from his Second Book of Pieces for the Viol (1701) with a weighty chaconne finale, just as Bach was later to do for his Partita in D minor for solo violin BWV 1004.

The theme that Marais picks for this series of variations over a repeated bass line is the traditional theme *La Folia* from the Iberian peninsula, a tune that over the course of three centuries has inspired sets of variations by more than

150 composers, including Lully, Purcell, Corelli, Handel, Bach, Liszt and Rachmaninoff.



In the 32 variations that follow, Marais uses the classic methods for varying his theme, including dividing the beat into smaller note values,



ornamenting melody notes with guitar-like flourishes in recognition of the theme's Spanish origins,



which even intensify into passages of virtuosic display,



all the while balancing quick variations with slow, more soulful ones



to create a monumental, multi-dimensional view of what this theme can become on a relatively limited lead instrument such as the viol.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor BWV 1011

The second cello suite by Bach to be performed this afternoon is the tonally and psychologically dark Suite No. 5 in C minor, performed on the original instrument for which it was written, the cello, but with an unusual tuning.

The top A string is tuned down to G, giving it a darker sound but creating more open resonance for chords of the home key of C minor, as there are now two open strings on the G pitch, an octave apart.



The *Prelude* that opens the Suite is somewhat unusual in being structured in two contrasting parts. The first is slow and pompous, constructed of “stop-and-start” phrases that lurch forward in dotted rhythms, their gravitas emphasized by means of triple and quadruple stops on many of the section’s downbeats, much in the manner of a French overture.

This musical reference is seemingly confirmed when the second part launches into a classic bouncy “fugue” subject.



The only problem is that it remains a single-line melody, without explicit countermelodies. And yet the “fugue subject” is so well balanced and catchy, structured so niftily into two-part melody-writing, that listeners end up “hearing” the other voices in their heads.

The *Allemande* is remarkably similar to the opening “French overture” section of the *Prelude*,



with emphatic multiple-stop chords on important downbeats in the phrasing that continue the suite’s mood of high seriousness.

The same might be said of the *Courante*



except that the running notes that characterize this dance genre (*courante* means “running”) create a much lighter texture overall.

The emotional heart of this suite is its *Sarabande*, which contains no multiple-stop chords at all, just a steady stream of 8th notes in a single melodic line roving restlessly over more than two octaves of sonic space.



While its rhythmic surface is almost flat, the great leaps and many heartbroken, sighing two-note phrases in its melodic line create a state of continuous harmonic tension as implied dissonances hang in the air, to be resolved only in the final cadence arrived at in each section.

This is the art of saying much by saying little.

The stark beauty of this movement and its indomitable will to move forward, step by step, no matter what the pain, made it the work chosen by Yo-Yo Ma to play on Sept. 11, 2002 at the first anniversary of the World Trade Center attacks, as the names of the dead being honoured were read out one by one.

The two strong upbeats leading into the following *Gavotte I* establish us firmly back in the rough rhythmic terrain of country dancing.



In this and in the following triplet-obsessed *Gavotte II*



a constant 1-2, 1-2 pulse makes counting easy and toe-tapping inevitable.

The concluding *Gigue*, with its leap-friendly dotted rhythms, agreeably balanced phrases and easy-to-follow, repetitive sequences of melody and harmony



ends the suite in a mood of measured merriment, despite the “serious” key of C minor in which it is written.

Henri Duparc

Lento from Sonata in A minor

The one work to be performed in this recital that is *not* from the Baroque era is the slow movement from the Sonata in A minor by French composer Henri Duparc, best known for his art songs composed to texts by Baudelaire, Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Goethe.

His three-movement *Sonata for Cello and Piano* was composed in 1867, when the composer was only 19 years old. Because he had insisted on destroying most of his early work, it remained undiscovered until well into the 20th century, when it was reconstructed out of draughts kept by his daughter.

It was premiered in 1948 by Pierre Fournier to mark the 100th anniversary of the composer’s birth.

The slow movement from this sonata, variously known as the *Lento* or *Lamento*, exudes a delicate air of melancholy



as the cello exhales downcast phrases against a celestial accompaniment of unusually spacious broken chords.

Antoine Forqueray

La Buisson

The gracious balanced phrases of Forqueray's *La Buisson* (likely a tribute to a musician surnamed Buisson) unfold over a repeating ground bass as a chaconne



but also in the form of a rondeau, as the opening refrain alternates with a series of intervening episodes.

Marin Marais

Les voix humaines

The contrast between the sound worlds of Forqueray and Marais is made abundantly clear in the dark timbre and deeply resonant texture of Marais' rondeau *Les voix humaines*,



the mysterious and enigmatic low tessitura of which, centred around the D below middle C, has a human warmth that goes beyond words.

Marin Marais Grand Ballet

In French aristocratic circles, *grand ballet* was the term used for the last dance at a courtly ball. As such, it was the most solemn and ceremonious of all.

Marais' *Grand Ballet* is the final dance of the Suite in A minor that opens Book III of the composer's *Pièces de viole*, published in 1711.



The large intervals of the opening theme mark the grand stately gestures that begin this dance. By the end, though, its performers — and the dancers for whom they were performing — will have worked themselves into a fine frenzy of heart-racing but refined excitement.



Marin Marais Le Tourbillon

Nicolas Altstaedt and Thomas Dunford end their recital with a vigorous virtuoso showpiece in *moto perpetuo* style entitled *Tourbillon* (Whirlwind), the breathless pace of which fully justifies its descriptive title.



Donald G. Gíslason 2025