

↓ **MARAIS *Folies d'Espagne*** (Guitar realization by Johannes Tappert) **TELEMANN**
12 Fantasias for Flute without Bass, TWV 40:2–13 (Bass part for guitar composed by Alan Thomas) • Cavatina Duo • BRIDGE 9541 (70:44) Reviewed from a WAV download: 44.1 kHz/16-bit

Thirty years ago, the name Marin Marais (1656–1728) may have been familiar only to a few music researchers, historians, and scholars poring over whatever manuscripts they could lay eyes and hands on from the French viol school of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Then, in 1991, film maker Jean-Louis Livi produced a movie titled *Tous les matins du monde* (All the Mornings of the World) adapted from a book of the same title by Pascal Quignard. The film was directed by Alain Corneau, and featured a superb cast of actors, which included Gerard Depardieu.

As movies about composers go, *Tous les matins du monde* may not have raked in the dollars that, say, *Amadeus* did, but the audiences it played to may well have found themselves transfixed by its haunting soundtrack and possibly exposed for the first time to the poignant and evocative viol music of both Marin Marais and his muse and mentor, Jean de Saint-Colombe (1640–1700). Famed viola da gambist Jordi Savall recorded the soundtrack.

The story is quite touching, time-shifting between the young Marais who seeks lessons from the stern, perfectionist Saint-Colombe and is dismissively sent away for not possessing the seriousness and self-discipline to be a musician, and the much older Marais who returns to Saint-Colombe's house to eavesdrop on the elderly master, secluded in his garden cabin, tirelessly practicing to perfect his art. Marais finally understands what it means to be a musician and Saint-Colombe welcomes him into the fold.

Marais's name is so inextricably tied to music for the viol it's surprising to discover that he composed anything else, but he did in fact compose for other media and in other genres, including opera. It's just that his eight books of suites for viol(s) and continuo, collectively titled *Pièces de viole*, when added up, contain a staggering number of over 550 pieces, and have come to typecast Marais as the viol *compositeur exclusif*, an impression surely reinforced by the movie.

Indeed, the *Folies d'Espagne* heard on the present release can be found in *Livre II* (Book II) of Marais's *Pièces de viole* for bass viol and continuo, dating from 1701. If you count from the beginning of Book II, the *Folies* is the 20th number. But Book II is comprised of eight separate suites, each containing several *pièces*. So, within Book II, the *Folies* is actually the first number of the Suite No. 2, where it appears under its French title, *Couplets* (i.e., Variations) *de folies*.

This, of course, is the familiar and famous *La folia* theme that became the subject for numerous sets of variations during the Baroque era. In no particular order, there are examples by Corelli, Albicastro, Alessandro Scarlatti, and C. P. E. Bach.

A common practice of the Baroque—and later too—was for composers and/or their publishers to produce printings of works for alternate instruments. And in this case, it was Marais himself who stated his intent to make his pieces easily transferable to other instruments, allowing for performance on organ, harpsichord, lute, violin, treble viol, recorder, traverso flute, guitar, and oboe. Of those alternatives, the flute seems to have been especially favored by Marais, as he claimed to have tried out his pieces on the flute himself and found them pleasing to his ear.

Thus, what we have here in this flute and guitar version of Marais's *Couplets de folies* (aka *Folies d'Espagne*) is certainly not unusual, and is likely to have historical precedent in the composer's own practice. Since Marais also names guitar as one of his alternative instruments, it seems perfectly logical that a guitar would accompany the flute in Marais's continuo part, which is performed here by guitarist Denis Azabagic of the Cavatina Duo in a realization by Johannes Tappert.

Listening to this performance by the Cavatina Duo, in which Eugenia Moliner plays the flute, I have to say that the music doesn't strike me as having quite the same timeless, haunting quality that it does when played on bass viol, as it is by Laurence Dreyfus with harpsichord continuo by Ketil Haugsand on a Simax recording dating back to 1992, or by Jordi Savall in the soundtrack to the movie. But the flute colors the music with its own distinctive mood, which, in its own way, I find equally satisfying and moving.

Oddly though—and I don't know why this is—recordings of Marais's *Folies d'Espagne* as originally conceived for bass viol are few and far between, with versions for flute seeming to be the preponderant alternative of choice. That being the case—and knowing that Marais himself tried out his pieces on the flute and liked the result—it would be insupportable to argue that the Cavatina Duo's flute and guitar performance is unmindful of historical practice and tradition. Moreover, I believe that Marais would smile and nod approvingly at a performance executed with such sensitivity and as beautifully as this one is by Moliner and Azabagic.

Telemann's 12 Fantasias for Flute without Bass, TWV 40:2–13 (c. 1733) are a different order of being altogether from Marais's *Pièces de viole*, first because they date from a next generation and later phase of the Baroque; and second because they're informed by a German predisposition to an abstract contrapuntal aesthetic vs. a French inclination towards representative/program music in the form of character pieces and an ornamental style.

Marais wrote his viol pieces with a continuo part, inviting great liberty in the participating duo; for it wasn't just a flute or an oboe that could substitute for the viol, but a guitar, a harpsichord, a theorbo, or even a second viol that could substitute for the continuo. But the third and most significant difference between Marais's pieces for viol and Telemann's solo flute fantasias is that Telemann made no such allowances for an accompanying instrument. Like Bach's Suites for Solo Cello and Sonatas and Partitas for Unaccompanied Violin, Telemann's fantasias were specifically conceived for a flute without backup in the form of a bass-supplying continuo instrument.

And so, Alan Thomas composed one for bass guitar, which is played here by Denis Azabagic of the Cavatina Duo. The idea is not entirely without precedent. No less a composer than Robert Schumann provided piano accompaniments to Bach's solo cello suites and violin sonatas and partitas. One assumes, however, that Thomas's guitar parts to Telemann's flute fantasias have some grounding in the flute parts they're designed to accompany, that they're not baseless fabrications.

As luck would have it, I happened upon a thesis titled, *A Performance Guide to Three of Telemann's 12 Fantasias for Flute Without Bass, Based on the Study of the Compound Melodies*, authored by Antônio Carlos Portela Da Silva in 2012 for his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Alabama's Graduate School of Music (acumen.lib.ua.edu/content/u0015/0000001/0000997/u0015_0000001_0000997.pdf). Da Silva's argument, essentially, is that from its implicit harmonies and compound lines one may extrapolate independent voices and thereby gain a greater comprehension of its counterpoint.

Much the same could be said for Bach's works for solo violin and cello, though I think the case might be a bit more difficult to make for Telemann's flute fantasias for the simple reason that the violin and cello are both capable of producing harmonic simultaneities in the form of double stops and chords, whereas the flute is not.

And this, I believe, is where Alan Thomas's guitar accompaniments come in. My listening tells me that they are not without solid foundation in the implicit harmonies and counterpoint in Telemann's flute parts. Thomas says as much in his album note, writing that "the added guitar part helps to bring out latent aspects of the solo flute line, fleshing out implied harmonies, making the dances that bit more rhythmic, and heightening the work's many *Affekts*."

The Cavatina Duo commissioned Thomas for these guitar accompaniments, and I think it was a commission well considered and well fulfilled. Eugenia Moliner, playing a modern flute, draws a tone from her instrument spun from pure silver. Her technique—intonation, breath control, evenness of tone across registers, and regulation of dynamic gradations—makes listening to Telemann's wonderful fantasias a pure joy; and Alan Thomas's guitar accompaniments, always discreet and stylistically appropriate, are played by Denis Azabagic with a touch and intuitive feel for Telemann's music that make these pieces sound as if this is how they were originally conceived and always meant to be. Listen, for example, to the gigue-like concluding movement of the BI-Major Fantasia (No. 4), and be prepared to get up and dance. With all due apologies to Herr Telemann, I fear that once you hear these performances of his flute fantasias with guitar accompaniment, you will never want to hear them unaccompanied again. **Jerry Dubins**

Five stars: Winning, charming, delightful, beautiful—no other words to describe it