

The Marais Project Newsletter

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The Marais Project Five Years On...

Yes, the thought is terrifying! Five years really have passed since Director Jennifer Eriksson founded *The Marais Project* as a musical celebration centred around her goal of performing the complete works of Marin Marais. Our final 2004 Season concert on October 31 will be the tenth in our self-promoted concert series, in addition to which we have given almost the same number of

concerts for other organisations including a live broadcast for ABCFM. Given that the survival rate of a small, unfunded chamber music ensemble in the 21st century is about the same as a dinosaur

“the survival rate of a small, unfunded chamber music ensemble in the 21st century is about the same as a dinosaur during the Ice Ages!”

during the Ice Ages, we thought that it would be worthwhile to reflect for a moment on the philosophy behind *The Marais Project*, where we are up to, and where we think we might be headed.

Purpose

The purpose of *The Marais Project* was, and is, to perform the works of Marais and his contemporaries in a modern-day Australian context. To Jennifer the expression of “modern-day” has always meant collaborating widely with different artists and art forms and even commissioning new music for the ensemble. We want to avoid being stuck in the so-called “early music ghetto” which happens all too easily when one plays instruments that only 50 years ago were considered extinct. The dinosaur metaphor really does have a range of applications!

Collaborations

We have conducted a number of collaborations over the past five years including a joint event with leading ceramic artist, Barbara Campbell-Allen, three performances with “The Early Dance

Consort”, and a unique concert featuring readings in French of French Baroque Poetry from the time of Marais. *The Marais Project* has also commissioned no less than three new works by Australian composers. These include a duo for two gambas and a short ballet by Stephen Yates, as well as a setting of James McAuley’s poem “Nocturnal” by Matthew Perry. The willingness of Stephen and Matthew to engage with our ensemble has been one of the high points of the past years.



Promotion

Getting your message out in a global city such as Sydney is tough at the best of times. It is even tougher for a niche chamber ensemble that plays viola da gamba music that even many music lovers do not know well. Nevertheless, we’ve had several successes and have been able to develop some useful tools. For example, we now have our own WWW site, as well as a promotional DVD made by young film and documentary maker, David Wild. *The Marais Project* has been reviewed in the Canberra Times and regularly in the Early Music Association journal. In addition, Jennifer has conducted interviews with James Valentine on ABC Radio 702 and for Canberra media outlets. If you are able to assist us in any way with promotion, please drop us a line.

New Audiences

In our view we have a responsibility to develop tomorrow's audience for fine music today. For this reason we have an active policy of donating a certain number of free concert tickets to organisations such as public and private schools and even to University music departments. In addition, Jennifer gives dozens of concerts each year as part of the Musica Viva Schools Program.

Where to next?

Jennifer intends to continue focusing on her goal of performing the complete works of Marin Marais in our annual concert series while allowing the style and content of the performances to develop through engagement with new collaborators, newly commissioned works and other composers from Marais' time. For example, we hope to stage a rare concert for three viola da gambas and continuo in 2005. In innovating we must also keep within our means as we have had little success in attracting government support. One-off chamber music events such as ours by nature operate "below the radar" attracting a relatively small, and thus to funders, an "elite" audience.

Thanks...

The Marais Project would not have survived – let alone thrived – without the support of many people from volunteer ushers to the



guest artists who perform and collaborate with us. In the latter category, Tommie Andersson, Belinda Montgomery, Catherine Tabrett, Matthew Ridley, Monika and Stan Kornel have been wonderful and reliable performance partners as have Fiona Garlick and John Bernard from the "Early Dance

Consort". Special thanks are due to Nicole Bannister for her ongoing French-English translations and work with the French speaking media such as SBS, "The Leading Partnership" for administration and marketing support and "Peach Advertising" for their wonderful brochure design skills.

Gossip Around the Shop

- A repeat performance of "La Folia" for the **Historic Houses Trust** in Old Government House was a great success. The concert was a "sell out" without any paid marketing.

- Our 2004 season launch "**Seven Strings: Music for Gambas and Voice**" attracted more than 160 concert goers in our new venue, the SBW Independent at North Sydney. All the buzz during and after the concert was about the premiere of **Matthew Perry's** beautiful new work, "Nocturnal". Great job Matthew!
- On August 14 we head down to **Canberra** with **The Early Dance Consort** for a second chilly mid-winter concert for local promoter Jill Downer. Details: ph 6282 7183
- Highly regarded early music specialist ensemble "**Salùt**" - whose Director **Tim Blomfield** studied baroque cello with Jaap ter Linden, (Jaap was also Jennifer's viola da gamba teacher) – has finally seen the light and included **Marin Marais** in their July concert program. Salùt's cellist/gambist **Daniel Yeadon** did a fine job.

The Labyrinth: *Entering the Maze*

"Labyrinth" (late Middle English)

A word first used to refer to the mythological maze constructed by the King of Crete to house the Minotaur.

Our next concert on October 31 features one of Marin Marais' strangest and most challenging pieces for the viola da gamba, "Le Labyrinthe". As many people are aware, Marais was a musician at the court of Louis XIV at Versailles. Within the famous Versailles gardens were two mazes, the beauty and secrecy of which Marais depicts in this unusual piece. During some twelve minutes of unique music Marais modulates through a range of distant keys and takes the viola da gamba to its technical limits.

Rarely performed, "Le Labyrinthe" is the centerpiece of another creatively constructed concert that includes Marais' famous "Sonnerie de Ste Geneviève du Mont-de-Paris", in which Marais imitates the bells of St Geneviève Church. In addition, there will be a second performance of Matthew Perry's "Nocturnal". Please join us.

"Works of art are of an infinite loneliness and with nothing to be so little reached as with criticism. Only love can grasp and hold and fairly judge them."

Raina Maria Rilke