

The Marais Project Newsletter

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Introduction

In 2002 the Marais Project entered its third year and in October we will complete the sixth concert in the series. Given the funds-starved context that faces “off the beaten track” chamber music concerts such as ours, we consider this to be a significant milestone, one we are celebrating with the publication of our first newsletter.

The purpose of the Marais Project is to perform the works of Marais and his contemporaries in a modern-day Australian context. For this reason previous concerts have included collaborations with other artists and art forms including French poetry, baroque dance, and contemporary ceramics.

To this point in time, Jennifer Eriksson, the Director of the Marais Project, has adopted a policy of independence from external funding in order to allow the concerts to develop their own style and focus. This policy is currently under review and Jennifer is in the process of investigating financial support options for 2003.

Marais goes national

In June this year the Marais Project went national when we were asked to perform in a Sunday Afternoon Live concert for ABCFM. Regular performance partners Catherine

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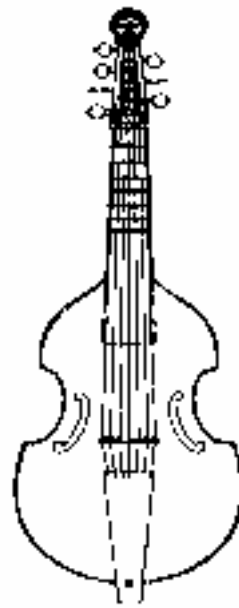
Tabrett (gamba) and Monika Kornel (harpsichord) were joined on this occasion by Matthew Ridley, one of Australia's leading recorder players. Those who attended the “*Marais and the Dance*” concert at

Women's College earlier in the year will remember that Matthew made a brief but entertaining appearance towards the end of the afternoon when he leapt up from the audience playing a dance tune on his recorder.

Along with works by Marais and his contemporaries, the broadcast also included a new work for two gambas, “*Tombeau pour Marin Marais*” by contemporary Australian composer, Stephen Yates. Stephen originally composed this piece for a previous Marais Project concert in 2001. All in all, we were very pleased with the outcome of the broadcast, as were the ABC. The next step in the future could well be the production of a CD, a path we are currently investigating with several organisations.

Who is Marin Marais?

Marin Marais, the son of a shoemaker, was born in Paris in 1656. He studied music from an early age and became one of the greatest viol players of all time. Marais was a student of Sainte-Colombe, a master violist of the previous generation. Legend has it that within six months of commencing study with the older Sainte-Colombe, Marais had surpassed his teacher. Jealousy prevailed over art and Sainte-Colombe declared he would no longer teach Marais.



Marais subsequently learned composition technique through performing in Lully's orchestra at the Court of Louis XIV. In 1679 he was appointed “*Musician in Ordinary to the King's Chamber*”. He composed operas, trios and, of course, the five books of pieces for the viola da gamba.

An excellent fictional account of Marais' life can be found in “*Tous le Matins du Monde*” (“*All the World's Mornings*”), by Pascal Quignard. This beautiful, whimsical book is essential reading for those wishing to explore the often difficult relationship between artistic master and pupil – the case in point being, Marais and Sainte-Colombe. There is also a French art house film made of the book which was a big hit in Europe in the 1980s. The movie has been broadcast several times on Australian television by SBS.

Viol facts

The viol family of instruments - of which the gamba is a member - was widely played in Royal Courts and well-off households across France, Germany, England, Italy and Spain from about 1500 to 1780. The viol family consists of the pardessus (the highest sounding), the treble viol, the tenor viol, the gamba, and the violone (the equivalent of the double bass). The collective noun for a complete set of viols is a “Chest”. Many middle class families performed

viol consort music together for recreation – children on the treble, mother on the tenor, and father on the bass gamba. The viols developed independently from the violin family and for a period of time in the baroque era the two groups of instruments existed side by side. That is, until the louder, more penetrating violin family won out.

Bach wrote three solo sonatas for the gamba and included it in both the St Matthew and St John Passions as well as a number of cantatas. Telemann was also a fan of the instrument as were many other composers.

Manze, Egarr, ter Linden

The life of a professional gamba player is quite lonely. Simply put, there are not enough of us to go around! For this reason Jennifer was thrilled to meet up recently with her former teacher, Dutchman Jaap ter Linden. Jaap was touring Australia for Musica Viva as a member of the ensemble “Manze, Egarr, ter Linden”, having previously visited Australia twice before with other ensembles.

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Jaap, who plays both baroque cello and the gamba as well as conducting (he recently recorded a complete version of the Mozart symphonies), is a leading interpreter of early music. Formerly a member of *Musica Antiqua, Kohn, The English Concert*, and *The Amsterdam Orchestra*, Jaap taught Jennifer for three years when she was a student at Rotterdams Conservatorium, The Netherlands. Jenny was Jaap’s first Aussie gamba student. Since then several Australians have sought him out as a teacher.

Manze, Egarr, ter Linden’s two Sydney concerts featured works from the early and late baroque as well as the premiere of “Baroquerie” by Australian composer Matthew Hindson which was specially commissioned for the occasion. Gamba lovers had the opportunity to hear a rare performance of one of JS Bach’s sonatas for the viola da gamba – what a great evening!

A new instrument

In February 2003 Jenny will travel to Cologne to pick up a new instrument she commissioned some two and a half

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years ago. Original period viols are very rare and extremely expensive so most performers use modern copies. The notable exception to this rule is Spanish virtuoso Jordi Savall, the founder of *Hysperion XX*, who possesses a beautiful original treble viol as well as an original gamba. In addition, the basic design of

the gamba is not as robust as the violin family so the viols simply do not last as long as violins.

Australia has a number of fine instrument makers (known as luthiers) – including several who build viols – but the

special requirements of the Marais Project dictated that on this occasion an overseas instrument was required.

Like new cars, new instruments need to be adjusted and “tuned” by the maker for the needs of the individual owner. For this reason Jenny will spend about a week in Cologne working with the luthier to make sure all is in order.

During 2002 Jenny purchased a new bow specially designed for the French viol repertoire by Melbourne luthier, Ian Watchorn. This bow is slightly longer than the normal viol bow and has already made a real difference to Jenny’s performances.

Concerts in 2003: mailing list

The Marais Project is currently completing the concert program for 2003. Although details are not yet finalised it is hoped that at least one concert will involve a major collaboration with “*The Early Dance Consort*”. If you are not on our mailing list please contact Jennifer on the above address and we will keep you up to date.

New recording

Finally, for those not yet had their fill of gamba facts and stories, Jennifer was delighted to receive a gift copy of a complete version of Bach’s solo cello suites transcribed for gamba and performed by Paolo Pandolfo. (Glossa GCD 920405).

As far as we know, this is the first complete recording of the cello suites on the gamba, and certainly the first recording by a performer of Pandolfo’s stature. Bach himself transcribed one of the cello suites for lute so the process has a solid foundation. As Pandolfo himself writes, “The practice of transcribing a work for an instrument different from the original was widely diffused throughout the

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centuries, and it is well known that Bach often transcribed his own compositions for other instruments”. Pandolfo has adopted a process he calls “elaboration” to realise the suites on gamba: the underlying principle being attention to the musicality of his version on the gamba, rather than trying to

attain strict note-for-note accuracy to the original cello version.

How does it sound? Well, the playing is wonderful, the music is inspiring, and the sound is, well, like a gamba! Having only heard the suites on the cello, the tone of the gamba was at first off-putting, but one quickly entered into Pandolfo’s approach and the recording has taken pride place in our CD collection. Maybe not a “must” for every Christmas stocking, but a lovely present for the music lover who has everything.

If you do purchase a copy of this CD, please drop us a line and let us know what you think.