

Marin Marais

Compositions from the First Book for two violas da gamba and basso continuo

Edited by Günter and Leonore von Zadow,
Edition Güntersberg G258 and G259 (two
volumes at €19.80)

These two volumes contain the music for two viols and continuo from Marais' *Premier Livre*, the first volume including the D minor *Suite* and the G minor *Tombeau de M. Meliton*, the second including the G major *Suite*. They are presented as the first two volumes of a 'Güntersberg Marais-Ausgabe', and I earnestly hope that these first two volumes are successful enough for that project to continue, because they have made a lovely job of it so far.

The 'elephant in the room' question; since this music is already in many of our libraries already in facsimile edition, easily legible, indeed so beautifully engraved that playing from it is actually a joy - do we really need a modern edition too? Every player will have their own

thoughts about this, but my own conclusion, having lived with these volumes for a few months now, is very positively in the affirmative. This is an edition crafted for players; because each viol has its own part-book, (rather than reading either left-hand or right-hand pages,) and less space is wasted on the page for shorter movements, the player has seven page-turns instead of twenty-one, and only one of those page-turns is in the middle of a piece. (The G major Chaconne runs to five pages in the original, and there is no breathing-space at all!) Bar numbering is a welcome rehearsal-time-saver.

A more important family of advantages arrives with the provision of scores; there are two of them, one with and one without a keyboard realization of the figured bass. In the getting-to-know stages, both players can therefore see what the other part is doing; even better, being able just to *read* the music in score makes it immeasurably easier to reflect on how the parts relate to each other and to the bass line. Furthermore, making sense of those figures will be easier for the continuo player too, when they can see what the solo lines are up to. And now my playing-partner and I can try these pieces out not only with our favourite theorbist, who *can* make sense of the figures, but also with a friend who would love to explore this music with us, but happens *not* to be a dedicated harpsichordist with the expertise to turn those figures into music. I must compliment Dankwart von Zadow on the beautifully crafted

keyboard realizations offered here; unfussy, consistently finding good solutions for voice-leading, and with an attention to detail suggesting that this job was done with great care, and as a labour of love.

In fact the whole publication is done to very high standards. Attractively bound, printed on good paper, first-rate typesetting on a well-chosen staff-size, generously laid out. A choice of two scores as mentioned, and part-books for each player, including a (figured) solo bass line. Editorial choices are sound, and clearly explained, with a philosophy of minimum intervention. I found just one, rather odd, error; a superfluous staccato in the first bar of the G major Minuet for Viol 1. Accidentals are modernised, as are repeat indications and the like, while original beaming is, sensibly, preserved, though I would have been glad if an exception could have been made for the G major Gigue, whose 6/8 mainly tum-ti-tum, tum-ti-tum rhythm is pretty hard work when notated entirely in separate notes. Another choice I might have made differently would be not to retain alto clefs in the bass line of the unrealized score; I *do* know how to read the alto clef, (honestly) but not when I'm playing a keyboard instrument and trying to realize figures at the same time!

All in all, I warmly commend these volumes to any players with a mind to explore the Marais '*à deux violes*' repertoire; the work of the von Zadows will not only considerably smooth the path for you, but will nourish a richer understanding of the astonishing beauties of these pieces.

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