

## Reviews

Edited by John Moran

### Sainte-Colombe le fils: Viola da Gamba solo Tombeau pour Mr Sainte-Colombe le père and the five Suites

Edited by Günter and Leonore von Zadow, Edition Güntersberg, 2020. G380, ISNM 979-0-50174-380-3. €18.00.

At the pinnacle of French Baroque viol music sits a triumvirate: Sainte-Colombe, Marais, and Forqueray. This gross simplification omits many significant personages and neglects the fact that each of these three names represents not just one person, but a famous father and a son following in his footsteps. After the death of Marin Marais (1656–1728), his son Roland (ca. 1685–ca. 1750) published his own two books of *pièces de viole* (1735 and 1738). Jean-Baptiste Forqueray (1699–1782), son of Antoine (1672–1745), had a complicated relationship with his father. Antoine's solos survive today because his son published a book of twenty-nine pieces for viol and basso continuo (1747), all but three of which he attributed to his father. This work entailed an apparent (posthumous?) collaboration in that the bass line was composed by Jean-Baptiste and appended to his father's pieces.

The two Sainte-Colombes are shrouded in mystery; we cannot even be certain of their forenames, and their exact relationship is not documented. Sainte-Colombe le père is regarded as the father to the entire school of French viol players. He is credited with introducing a wire-wound string for his lowest (sixth) string and, probably subsequent to this, adding the still lower seventh string. He counted Marin Marais and (presumably) his own children among his many pupils. His son apparently carried forth the tradition in Britain. Neither of them published any music; their copious output survives exclusively in hand-written form. In the case of Sainte-Colombe le fils, all of his extant works are contained in the Durham Cathedral Library's Manuscript A27, an extensive, 350-page collection of gamba music by multiple composers including Simpson, Finger, Schenck, Dubuisson, and Marais, compiled between 1700 and 1730 by Philip Falle, a clergyman and avid music lover. He donated his library to Durham Cathedral. Unica from Falle's compendium by various composers were previously published by Güntersberg (*Mr Falle's Solos*, vols. 1 and 2 (G367 and G368)).

In this edition, as in the manuscript, the pieces are presented as unaccompanied solos. (Unlike Jean-Baptiste Forqueray, Sainte-Colombe did not leave behind bass lines for his father's, or even his own, pieces.) Some have proposed that these pieces might have had bass parts that were not included in A27, or that even if they did not, there is historical precedent for adding bass lines as Marin Marais did, publishing his first book of *pièces de viole* (Paris, 1686)

without accompaniment, issuing the separate bass part three years later. Those who follow gamba-geek chatter on social media might have noticed a heated discussion in a Facebook group concerning this very idea, accompanied by the posting of a video showing a polished performance of one of these Sainte-Colombe le fils pieces, boldly and stylishly performed with added basso continuo played by a harpsichord and a second bass viol. Passions flared and many strong words were exchanged, both for and against, but—plot spoiler alert—it did not break the internet. We are fortunate to have a thriving viol scene with plenty of room for experimentation. Indeed, with the exception of the A-minor suite in this set, which is largely devoid of chords and double stops, these pieces abound in richly conceived harmony that could be claimed as evidence that no accompaniment was intended, or as justification for enriching the music further by adding continuo.

Sainte-Colombe le fils's oeuvre—its entirety is included in this edition—consists of five suites (G minor, F minor, F major, E minor, and B minor) and the *Tombeau* in F minor for his father. In about 1980, Peggie Sampson edited the *Tombeau* for Dove House in an arrangement that included a continuo part. Jonathan Dunford's 1998 edition for Tournus (without added continuo) included all the pieces of the set except the F-major suite, which subsequently was included in Güntersberg's edition of *Mr Falle's Solos* (G367). A notable feature of Sainte-Colombe le fils's music is that, unlike other French music of the period, his does not require a seven-string viol. This accommodation for English players, who had largely not adopted the seventh string, could have been made by either Sainte-Colombe as composer or Falle as copyist.

The von Zadows have produced an edition, true to the source, for bass viol alone and, as we have come to expect from them, it is a very good edition. The layout is elegant, though some page turns are not as well conceived as they could have been, particularly in the tombeau. Editorial decisions are logical and clearly explained in a helpful introduction. For each passage posing editorial issues, the critical report includes a facsimile illustration of that bit of the manuscript, so that performers can inform themselves and make up their own minds.

This is wonderful music, as inventive and engaging as the music of the better representatives of the French school. The G-minor suite, which opens the set, is particularly satisfying, containing exquisitely lush sonorities without being inordinately difficult. The *Tombeau* stands out from the rest in many ways, not least of which is the choice of key: F minor. As Timothy (En-Ming) Lin pointed out in his review of this edition for the Viola da Gamba Society (of Great Britain), “both *Tombeau po[u]r M[onsieu]r S[ain]te Colombe le pere* by Sainte Colombe le fils and the *Tombeau, les Regrets* by Monsieur de Sainte Colombe are constructed in five sections as a sequence of events drawn from the Orpheus myth.” (*The Viol*, no. 62, Spring 2021, p. 26) The son's *Tombeau* for his father includes evocative sections titled *Passage du Styx, dernier*

*Adieu* (last farewell), and *desespoir* (despair). These pieces seem very human, and the relatively compact size of the opus is very inviting.

John Moran  
Arlington, Virginia