

PROGRAM NOTES

Mary Ruth Ray (1956-2013) was a founding violist in the Lydian String Quartet, (est. 1980) which I joined in 1987. The Quartet is in residence at Brandeis University, and Ms. Ray, in addition to playing and teaching viola and chamber music, was Department Chairman for the last eight years. She was also active in Emmanuel Music in Boston from its inception in the 1970s, when they began regular performances of Bach cantatas and developed a chamber music series well known to Boston audiences. She was very supportive of Aston Magna's concerts and workshops at Brandeis and was always a wonderful colleague in the Quartet and elsewhere. Although she did not play restored ("period") violas, she particularly loved Bach and played and taught it to her many students. We miss her quiet, supportive and warm advocacy, and her friendship.

Daniel Stepner

Marin Marais was part of the generation immediately following the musical reign of Jean-Baptiste Lully. He began his studies with Jean de Sainte-Colombe, but quickly surpassed his teacher in technique (their relationship is explored in the film *Tous les matins du monde*). He soon established a place at court, having found favor with Lully, who taught him composition. In the year preceding Lully's death, he took up composition as a profession and his first works were widely acclaimed. With a multitude of chamber works (all of them including viol) and a handful of operas under his belt, his status began to wane in 1709.

Sonnerie is found in Marais's 1723 collection *La gamme et autres morceaux*. The church in the title of this piece is that of an Augustinian monastery, thought to be founded by Clovis. The church was destroyed in 1800 after the order was suppressed by the revolutionary assembly several years earlier. All that is left of the building is the bell tower, the music of which is commemorated in this piece written earlier in the century. "Sonnerie" refers to bell ringing, heard in the repeated three-note pattern. The brightest sound in this work, of course, is made by the violin, but it is not the center of attention. The cooler timbre of the viol produces musical fireworks in the middle range, and that is where the interest lies. The rest is structure and, broadly speaking, counterpoint. The work, with its incessantly repeating bass line and triple meter, also qualifies as a *chaconne*—a popular variation form derived from a Spanish dance.

Between 1686 and 1725, Marais was easily the most prolific producer of *pièces de viole*, amounting to 596 works in five books. The term generally indicates music for one viol and continuo, though other combinations were composed. Marais very strongly recommended that the continuo instrument be a theorbo, rather than a keyboard instrument. In the 1711 edition of the third book, the suites are not denoted by titles, and each movement is numbered, from the beginning of the volume. Each suite begins with a prelude and a new key.

The *Passacaille* is a movement from the second suite in G minor, published in 1692 as part of the *Pièces en trio*. This splendid set of brief variations resembles the *Sonnerie*

above, but with a greater sense of freedom. Each variation is paired with another, creating eight-measure patterns. Mr. Stepner has enriched the work by putting four instruments on the two treble lines.

Marais composed *Sémélé* in 1709 based on a libretto by Antoine Houdar de Lamotte. The character of Sémélé, as related in some versions of the Greek myth, is in love with Jupiter. He returns her affections, much to the ire of Juno, who plots the girl's destruction, and succeeds by playing on Sémélé's ambitions. The poor reception of this opera was one of the main reasons for Marais's retreating from public life.

Johann Sebastian Bach compiled his Brandenburg Concertos in Cöthen in response to a request (not really a commission) in 1718-19 from the court of Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg-Schwedt. It might be fair to say that his request from Bach brought the Margrave more fame than anything else he did. The irony, of course, is that, after receiving the scores that would always be named for him in the spring of 1721, the Margrave never heard these unparalleled masterpieces. Neither did he acknowledge them, nor pay for them.

As for Bach, he claimed that he had worked on the set over a period of two years (along with a number of other pieces), but it is more likely that they are the fruit of more extensive effort. The instrumentation, which partly doomed their future in Brandenburg, was based on the forces the maestro had at Cöthen. The Margrave did not cultivate music the way Bach's employer Leopold did and had no such solo or orchestral forces.

The second Brandenburg concerto is a glowing example of the above: the trumpet part is still regarded as one of the most difficult in the repertoire, and could not have been played by just anyone. The same could be said of the other solo parts in this concerto: oboe, violin, and recorder. These are challenging parts, and challenging to blend. The ripieno, too, while not so difficult, still requires a certain level of discipline.

These are the forces of a concerto grosso: a group of soloists and an ensemble of strings. First movements in Baroque concertos often use ritornello form, the basis of which is the return of opening material (either part or all of it) at several junctures of the movement. Because of the momentum and the ceaseless and dominant presence of the soloists, this pattern is somewhat disguised in this context. The complete pause towards the end punctuates one return of the opening material. The Andante seems formless as it works with a single theme over a pacing continuo part. Repeated sighing motives fill out much of the movement. The exhilarating finale is a kind of fugue (notice the sequence of entries at the beginning), though leaning towards a ritornello treatment of the subject. Bach's goal of letting the instrumentalists rejoice in a fountain of stimulating musical material is evident.

The cantata *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!*, BWV 51 was born during a different segment of the master's life: his years in Leipzig, while working primarily as a church

musician. As such, one of his responsibilities was writing the music for each Sunday and feast day, which consisted of what are now called cantatas. There are so many Bach cantatas because he allegedly wrote five cycles of these—one per year. This particular cantata was written for the 15th Sunday of Trinity, which occurred on September 17, 1730.

The text of this work is of uncertain origin. The fourth movement, the chorale, is by Johann Gramann, an early Lutheran. The second movement, the recitative, is derived from psalm texts. It has been suggested that Bach himself wrote the texts of the other two movements, but this has not been proven. Of interest in these two movements are the references to the Gospel reading of that particular Sunday, especially the references to all that we receive from God in our trials (Matt. 6:30) and every “morrow” (Morgen) being new (Matt. 6:34).

This cantata for solo soprano (one of four such cantatas written by Bach) boosts its energy level with the inclusion of a trumpet in the outer movements. The instrument’s brilliant fanfares exalt the object of praise even further. The outer movements also take on the guise of Italian concerto style, lending even greater radiance.

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