

SAMUEL NG AND KRISTIINA WATT

VIOLA DA GAMBA AND THEORBO
Fables and Humanity – life lessons from Monsieur de la Fontaine

📅 Thursday 11 July 🕒 11.15am – 12.15pm

📍 St John's Church

As a cellist and viol player, **Samuel Ng** works with ensembles such as The English Concert, Academy of Ancient Music, Gabrieli Consort and Players, and Irish Baroque Orchestra. He has appeared at the Vienna Philharmonic Ball and the BBC Proms, and has performed and broadcast as a chamber musician in Europe.

Lutenist **Kristiina Watt** performs on a variety of lutes and guitars from the 16th to 19th centuries. As a chamber musician, her recent concerts include performances with Rachel Podger, the Illyria Consort and a tour with the Academy of Ancient Music. As an orchestral musician, Kristiina has performed with many of the leading UK orchestras in historical performance and beyond.

Pièces de Viole (Pieces for viol), Book 4 – Suite No. 1 in D minor
1. Prélude; 2. Allemande; 3. La Mignone; 4. Caprice; 5. Minuet; 6. Gigue la petite; 7. Rondeau

Marin Marais (1656-1728)

Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, viols were the favourite string instruments for domestic music-making, but they were gradually overtaken in popularity by the more agile and expressively varied violin family. The bass viol, or *viola da gamba* (literally, 'leg-viol'; smaller, higher-pitched viols are held upright on the lap), hung on longest, particularly in France, and several composers wrote music for it.

Marais was one of the leading French viol players of his generation. He studied with one of the great players, Jean de Sainte-Colombe, and was playing in the orchestra of the Paris Opéra by the age of about twenty. The Opéra's music director, Jean-Baptiste Lully, paved the way for him to be appointed a musician in King Louis XIV's court, and encouraged his composing.

He wrote four operas, but they are overshadowed by the five books of pieces for, mostly, solo bass viol (some are for two or three viols) and continuo which he published between 1686 and 1725. The movements that make up each suite vary in number from seven (the first two suites of Book 4) to thirty-eight. They mainly comprise the standard dance-movements of the baroque instrumental suite – allemande, slow with a florid melodic line; courante, in a moderate triple time, regarded as grand and majestic; sarabande, slow, dignified, and often profoundly introspective; and the lively, spirited gigue. These are occasionally interspersed with vivid character-studies with descriptive titles, and with structurally more ambitious pieces, mainly at the beginning and the end of each suite.

The first suite from Book 4 opens with a slow, meditative Prelude. For the second half of the Allemande, Marais supplied a written-out repeat with added ornamentation ('Agrements pour la 2^e fois' = ornaments for the second time). This is followed by 'La Mignonne' (sweet, cute, pretty), perhaps a short sketch of an actual person, and the vigorous 'Caprice'. After the brief 'Menuet' comes the bouncy 'Gigue la petite', marked 'very gaily', and the suite ends with the energetic 'Rondeau'.

Pièces de Violes – Suite No. 1 in E minor

1. Prélude; 2. Allemande; 3. Courante; 4. Sarabande; 5. Gavotte; 6. Gigue; 7. Passacaille ou Chaconne

François Couperin (1668-1733)

François Couperin, sometimes known as 'le grand' (the great), was the most prominent member of a musical dynasty active in the Paris area from the end of the sixteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth. In 1693 he was appointed court organist to Louis XIV. By 1714 he is also thought to have begun standing in for Louis's increasingly frail court harpsichordist, Jean-Henri d'Anglebert. He



is widely regarded as the most important French composer of his generation.

He is known primarily for his harpsichord music, for both solo instrument and ensemble. His only published volume of pieces for bass viol and continuo appeared in 1728, comprising eleven pieces grouped into two suites. It seems likely that he was paying a conscious homage to the French tradition of music for bass viol, 1728 being the year in which Marin Marais died.

The first suite is the more conventional, consisting mostly of the dance pieces detailed in the note on Marais, above. The introspective Prelude ('Gravement' = seriously) is followed by the Allemande, marked 'lightly', the springy Courante, the Sarabande, marked 'serious', like the Prelude, and the Gavotte, an extremely popular dance in the 1720s and 30s, both in ballets and at social functions. After the Gigue, usually the final movement in a baroque suite (here marked 'gaily'), Couperin adds a 'Passacaglia or Chaconne'. The two terms refer to similar dance forms, often involving a repeated chord-sequence or melody, which gradually became its defining characteristic. In using both titles, was Couperin hedging his bets, or did he simply regard the two terms as interchangeable? The middle section moves into the minor key, after which the final section becomes increasingly virtuosic.

Pièces de Viole, Book 4 – Suite No. 2 in D major

1. Prelude; 2. Allemande la Guinebault; 3. Allemande de la Familiere; 4. Boutade; 5. Gavotte la Favoritte; 6. La petite Brillante; 7. Rondeau le Gracieux

Marin Marais

In Suite No. 2 from Marais' Fourth Book, the titles for the individual pieces following the Prelude, suggest that they are all character-pieces. 'Boutade' means joke; the piece is to be played 'lightly'. The other titles include what are probably personal names (or nicknames, at least), suggesting that the movements in question are portraits of the people concerned.