

MARAIS Pièces en trio • Musica Pacifica (period instruments) • VIRGIN VERITAS 561365 2 (2 CDs: 135:52)

Suites: in g, B^b, g, B, D, C, d, C, c, e. *Les Contrefaiseurs*

Marais is so inextricably linked to his own instrument, the viol, that it ostensibly comes as something of a surprise that he chose for his second major publication (in 1692) these *Pièces en trio pour les Flutes, Violon et Dessus de Viole*, 67 movements arranged in six suites. Yet there is a direct stylistic exemplar in the trio texture frequently employed by Marais's teacher Lully, and an even more explicit precedent in the *Trios pour le coucher du Roy*, a manuscript attributed to Lully, but which nevertheless contains 16 pieces by Marais. The closeness of the connection is immediately apparent if one listens to a movement like the Prelude to the C-Major Suite, a typically Lullian French overture.

In one important respect, however, Marais far excels his erstwhile master, for there is an expressive warmth and sensitivity about these pieces that is rarely in evidence in the aloof and formal Lully. Each suite is framed by a Prelude, imaginatively diversified in form, and concludes with a chaconne or passacaglia that demonstrates the composer's mastery in handling large-scale forms. In between come the usual assortment of stylized dance movements, particularly appropriate in the present instance since it was a dancer, Marie-Anne Roland, who was not only the subject of Marais's dedicatory preface but also of the lovely character piece in the B^b-Major Suite. But every movement has its own particular delight and interest, since Marais shares with his near contemporary François Couperin the rare ability to flesh out the simplest of dances with harmonic interest. In keeping with the established principles of the period, Musica Pacifica has not conformed with the composer's exact arrangement, preferring instead to create 10 rather than the original six suites. It has also opted to add a third melody instrument, an oboe, to the forces called for by Marais, thus allowing for a greater variety of color. Again this seems a perfectly legitimate procedure, given the flexibility so frequently adopted by composers at this time. In point of fact so ravishingly beautiful are Musica Pacifica's performances that they could have played on virtually any instruments so far as I'm concerned. Wann, expressive, and intensely alive to every nuance, this is playing to ravish the senses of anyone prepared to submit to this exquisitely understated chamber music.

The sound is as sympathetic as the performances, but a word of warning if you take my strong advice to go out and buy the discs. Don't go looking for double-set box—unusually for a new full-price set (I assume) it is issued in a single jewelbox with no indication on the front that it contains two discs. **Brian Robins**

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