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L'Itinéraire: the Baroque jewel of the Dordogne

Another success in the Périgord!

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Theorbist Mik Fentross, who features in two of the concerts of L'Itinéraire day

Itinéraire Baroque en Périgord, 2024: *L'itinéraire*. Various Locations, 3.8.2024

La Gracieuse Robert Smith (viola da gamba); Mike Fentross (theorbo). Église Saint-Laurent de Mareuil, 0930.

Marais Suite in A (Book 2). Suite in G minor (Book 3). Suite in E minor (Book 4)

What a way to begin the 2024 Itinéraire!

Robert Smith is the most impressive of gambists, joined here by the excellent theorbo player Mike Fentross. Smith's playing is of a purity rarely heard on any instrument; his gamba positively sings, something certainly to the fore in the Prélude to Marais' Suite in A (from the second book of pieces; (from the second book of pieces; all Suites are from Marais' *Pièces de viole des Cinq Livres*)). It is nice to hear just with theorbo; Smith's recording for Resonus Classics includes harpsichord, and an extra gamba for the bassline. The acoustic of Mareuil's Église Saint-Laurent was perfect; a large space (this is the communal concert before the audience is split up) suddenly made intimate. Something very clear in the opening Prélude of the A-Minor Suite. The "Boutarde" that follows, full of stopping despatched with preternatural ease by Smith, was nicely robust (more so than on the recording); it is cruelly short. 'La Gracieuse' (the title of Smith's Resonus disc) follows, full of magical *pianissimi* before a delightful final dance.

Here's his recording of 'La Gracieuse':

Suite in A Major: III. La Gracieuse



The G-Minor Suite (from the Third Book) entertains maximal contrasts: the fantasy of the opening ‘Prélude’ against the well-behaved ‘Carprice’ that follows. Again it was the slow sections that impressed so deeply, here a ‘Plainte’ of supreme longing. The bells of the church ringing the hour were part of the journey here (which only added to the charm); as were Smith’s gorgeous rolled chords at the opening of the ‘added’ movement (‘La Georgienne dite La Maupertay,’ from the G-Minor Suite of the Fifth Book).

Here's the astonishing ‘:a Georgienne”:

Suite in G Minor: VIII. La Georgienne dite la Maupertuy



Finally, four movements from the Suite in E-Minor from the Fourth Book, appropriately the most outgoing of the three Suites we heard. The 'Prélude' is almost a fantasia in itself; it is indeed followed by a 'Fantaisie'. But at its heart is a 'Sarabande à l'epagnol,' supremely expressive, with Fentross superbly sensitive to the ongoing flow. And finally, a surprise: the Suite's eleventh (!) movement, 'La Biscayenne' with special guest star soloist on Koopman on drum. A delightful close.

Here indeed is 'La Biscayenne' (it is actually subtitled, ('Tambourin')) from Smith's disc:

Suite in E Minor: VI. La Biscayenne (Tambourin)



... back in 2019, incidentally, Itinéraire Baroque presented *Moi, Marais!*, an acted spectacle including Marais' viola da gamba works performed by Alberto Rasi, with actor/comedian Lorenzo Bassotto (review [here](#)).

And so the Itinéraire began - our little group began with ...

Musick for a While Musica Gloria. Église Saint-Martin de Champeaux, 1100.





NB this is very much a stock photo: they were NOT dressed like that

H. Purcell *Musick for a While* (*Oedipus*, Z 583); *Hornpipe* (*The Old Bachelor*, Z 607); *Entry Dance & Rondeau*, Second act tune (*The Fairy Queen*, Z 629); *When Orpheus* (*Celestial Music did the Gods Inspire*, Z 322); *Harpsichord Suite in D: Almand, Corent & Hornpipe*. *His Solitude* (*Comes Amoris*); *Strike the viol, touch the lute* (*Come, ye sons of art*)

D. Purcell *The Unhappy Penitent: Slow Air*.

Wordsworth *I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud*

Musica Gloria comprises Pieter De Praetore (counter-tenor), Nele Vertommen (oboe/recorder), Anne-Linde Visser (cello/viola da gamba) and Beniamino Paganini (harpsichord/recorder). As you can see, they are a talented, multi-instrumentalist lot: this concert was an affirmation of the joy youth can bring to music making. Their discs have already announced Musica Gloria as an imaginative group (*Corelli and Handel:*

Musical Encounters in Rome and *Fasch's Oboe* are the ones I am familiar with).

Beginning with 'Musick for a While' is brave – one of Purcell's most famous pieces, if not his most famous. There was an element of theatre about this performance, the musicians making themselves known to us one by one. Pieter De Praetere has a lovely voice, his control at the separated statements of the word 'all' was excellent, as was his ornamented version of the opening section on its repeat.

The music was perfectly chosen: a sprightly Hornpipe from *The Old Bachelor*, and two excerpts the *pièce du semaine*, *The Fairy Queen*: The Prom performance on Tuesday (August 6) from Les Arts Florissants, a Purcell/hip-hop mélange, was unforgettable, and of course there was the performance at Thaxted by the Armonico Consort and Players this year ([review](#)). All of this renewal of interest in non-*Dido* works is to be welcomed (whilst not forgetting the genius of that seminal work). The two excerpts here, a noble 'Enry Dance' and gracious 'Rondeau,' with some wonderfully controlled oboe playing from Nele Vertommen.

The song 'When Orpheus' (from *Celestial Music did the Gods Inspire*, Z 322) again had an element of theatre, which only served to underline the hetabreaking nature of the song. Here's Lucille Richardot on Harmonia Mundi with the Ensemble Correspondances under Sébastien Daucé (performers familiar from Versailles):

Celestial Music: When Orpheus sang



A procession of instrumental pieces (from a Harpsichord Suite and more *Fairy Queen*) led to the one piece by Henry's brother, Daniel Purcell (c 1664-1717). a lovely piece featuring Vernommen. The Wordsworth poem was recited in French before the lute 'Oh, Solitude,' De Praetere at his most touching (this is one of Purcell's finest songs, with echoes of Dido's sighs of 'Ah, Belinda' from the opera *Dido and Aeneas*). Another Fairy Queen "entr'acte" before the absolutely infectious 'Strike the viol' from *Come ye sons of art*, a birthday ode for Queen Mary.

Here's an improvisatio/riff on 'Strike the viol,' for an Alpha disc performed by the ensemble Arpeggiata:

Come Ye Sons of Art, Z. 323 "Ode for Queen Mary's Birthday": No. 5, ...



Without doubt, Musica Gloria deserves very success. They invigorate this music beyond compare.

Dios y Hombre Cantoría (Jorge Losana, director/tenor). Église de Saint Front sur Nizonne, 1200.





Photo © Xaora-Fotografo_BD. Again, a stock photo - we were nowhere near the sea

Flecha *Cancinero de Barcelone* (excerpts). *Fantasia qu contraze e harpa di Ludovico. Las Ensaladas de Flecha.*

Guerrero *El toro. La bomba.*

Mudarra *Prado verde y florido. O Virgen cuando os miro. Si tis penas no pruebo. Huyd, huye o ciegos amadores.*

This concert was subtitled ‘Polyphonic Vocal music of the Spanish Renaissance’. The Spanish vocal ensemble Cantoría has already issued one disc of music by Flecha, entitled *Ensaladas*, on Editions Ambronay: there it was four voices only (Inés Alonso soprano, Oriol Guimerà alto, Jorge Losana tenor & artistic director and Valentín Miralles bass); here there was a change of bass (to Víctor Cruz) and the group was augmented by Pablo FitzGerald on vihuela.

Mateo Flecha (‘El Viejo,’ c. 1481-1553) was a Catalan composer; Francesco Guerrero (1528-1599) Andalusian. The more spiritual songs

of Guerrero contrast with the concentrated expression of Flecha. The first piece, 'Los reyes siguen la estrella,' set the stall for Flecha's music in its very unpredictability, coupled with a real dramatic flair; the lullaby that followed showed a very different side. Throughout, though, there was the purity of approach and attack from Cantoría, blissfully low, often free of, vibrato. Rhythms dance with this group, and the way they sing implies what we hear is the result of a long journey from manuscript to vibrant life.

For all of the excellence of Flecha and Guerrero, it was the vihuela music of Alonso Mudarra (1510-1580) that impressed the most, perhaps most in the almost chorale-like *O Virgen*. A composer to explore, for sure.

Cantoría are superb ambassadors of this repertoire; this was a concert to relish. Wit met profundity; the result touched the soul.

La Naissance de l'Air baroque Johanette Zomer (soprano); Mike Fenross (theorbo). Église Saint-Martin de Saint-Félix de Bourdelles, 1515.

Monteverdi *Laudate Domnum.*

Frescobaldi *Se l'aura spira.*

Kapsberger *Toccata. Già risi del mio mai.*

Constantijn Huygens *Le réveil de Calliste (Aubade)*

Caccini *Amarilli mia bella.*

Nicholas Lanier *No more shall meads be deck'd with flowers*

From *Frische Lust-Hof* (1621 book of popular Netherlandish songs):
Goddine, wiens minne

Purcell *Music for a while*

Statistically, not every concert in a day such as this will be of equivalent excellence. The experienced soprano is clearly something of a linguist (she sang fluently and convincingly in Italian, French, English and Dutch), but her voice is a little tired, and she was upstaged somewhat by the enthusiasm of her theorboist. Mike Fentross (who we met what seemed by this stage a long time ago, but was actually only at 0930 that morning). Zomer's recordings are finer than what we heard here ; the Monteverdi lacked just the last ounce of rhythmic flamboyance; at the other end of the recital, Purcell's 'Music for a While' paled in comparison to the Musica Gloria performance.

What were lovely was the poignant Dutch song *Goddine, wiens minne*, and Huygens' *Le reveil de Calliste*, and Lanier's *No more shall meads be deck'd with flowers* was completely convincing in its beauty (and who doesn't like the idea of a rosy bower?).

It was though wonderful to hear a Toccata by Kapsberger on theorbo, complemented by a rare outing for one of his songs. Sadly, not the finest concert of the day.

Entre l'Ange et la Bête Catalina Vicens (organetto, positive organ).
Église Saint-Jean Baptiste de Puyrénier, 1630

Catalina Vicens

While there was a listed programme for this lecture-recital, the musicologist and performer Catalina Vicens instead presented a clutch of pieces introducing her instrument, the organetto (it looks a bit like an accordion) and the positive organ. The event title refers to drawings found in the marginalia of books of the time.

If you want to get an idea of the extraordinary sounds of this concert, try Vicens' remarkable disc *An Old Hall Lady* on the 2L label, where she is joined by Trio Mediæval. The music is strange, haunting, modern yet timeless. Perhaps most extraordinary was her performance of Machaut: *Dame votre douz Vlaire*, an expressive melody against a drone (interestingly, vibrato was used to increase emotion).

In addition, we heard some music for the positive organ from the Florentine court, plus an improvisation on Hildegard's music. The whole event was spell-binding. Vicens is a captivating narrator (it was mainly in French, with portions translated by Vicens into English).

Music at the Court of Ommeyades Les Aromates. Château de Connezac, 1800

Les Aomates (stock photo)

The final (now communal) concert took place not in a church but at a château (and a very nice one, at that); it was also outside. And this was very outdoorsy music: the group Les Aromates comprises percussion (Michèle Claude), flutes (Isabelle Duval), violin (Baptiste Frugier), viola (Lou Deschamps), double-bass (Julien Blanchard) and lute/vihuela (Johnathan Lemarquand). We were transported via music to the courts of the Caliphs of Spain. Perhaps appropriately, it was baking hot in the sun.

The music encompassed gypsy flamenco, and music from North Africa and the Middle East, including Sephardic sounds. The sound is remarkable, the rhythms infectious. If you want to hear what the group sounds like, try their Alpha disc *Rayon de Lune*, although bear in mind that is a studio-cleansed version of what we heard in France. Live, there is vibrant electricity everywhere – I am genuinely surprised no-one got up to dance. To hear Les Aromates is a thrilling experience. Each member is a virtuoso, and each member (pardon the pun) got his or her moment in the sun. They do extroversion and they do tenderness with equal ease. For my tastes, and purely for my tastes, there was rather too much of a good thing, but I suspect I could be in the minority there.

Robert Smith's Marais disc *La Gracieuse* is available from *Amazon* [here](#); Musica Gloria's disc *Fasch's Oboe* is [here](#), and their

Corelli/Handel disc *Encounters in Rome* is [here](#).

Cantoria's excellent *Ensaladas* disc is [here](#); Catalinna Vicens' *Old Hall Ladymass* is [here](#). and Les Aromates' Alpha disc *Rayon de Lune* is available at a absolute steal from *Amazon* at £5.95 [here](#).

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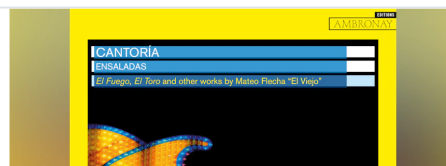
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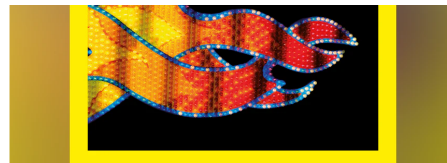


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