

Liner Notes for Marais at Midnight CRC 3866

"...joua qui voulut, et qui voulut aussi prêta l'oreille au joli concert de Vizé, Marais...et avec cela l'on attrapa minuit..."

"...those who wished, played and those who wanted to, listened to the lovely concert given by Visée, Marais...[and others]; and suddenly it was midnight..."

Lettres de Madame de Sévigné de sa famille et de ses amis, ed. M. Monmerqué (Paris 1862-66) 10: 352-53.

Music, art, and literature constitute the essence of the past, and have the power to bring historical events and people to life with an authentic immediacy of feeling. The massive scale of Versailles and the hubris of Louis XIV belie the very human lives lived within those walls. Our intent in choosing to record these pieces on our intimate instruments, viola da gamba and theorbo, is to draw the listener not only into the innermost sanctum of the court of Versailles, but into the innermost region of the king's heart.

Louis XIV had an appreciation for the viola da gamba which guaranteed its status throughout his long reign. For forty years he encouraged Marin Marais to compose music that has become the centerpiece of its repertoire. With his recognition of Marais' genius, Louis ennobled the viola da gamba, bestowing upon it a legacy that has become its birthright. Marais' music spoke to Louis on the most intimate level of human communication, for Marais often played in rooms reserved exclusively for the monarch's family and close friends. Marais was the music Louis asked to hear long after he ceased to participate in other forms of court entertainment.

The instruments used for this private music were the ones best suited to the execution of intimate nuances of expression. As a player of lute and guitar himself, Louis could well appreciate a performer who could master the art of conveying light and shade with the stroke of fingers releasing the string. When combined with the bell-like sound of the viola da gamba, a kind of "bowed lute," the effect becomes a perfect marriage of two like-minded souls. One of the forms this exquisite expressivity took was in the execution of ornaments Marais added to his melodies to shape their inflection. He was meticulous in notating every possible detail to convey his aesthetic and the twenty-first century player has no greater teacher.

We have chosen pieces particularly suited to being played on our instruments without further help from a harpsichord or accompanying viol. We imagine instead a midnight-hour *petit concert* in the chambers of Madame de Maintenon, the viola da gamba and theorbo bending toward each other in intimate conversation.