NAXOS

Jean-Marie LECLAIR

Violin Sonatas • Book 1

Adrian Butterfield, Baroque Violin
Alison McGillivray, Viola da Gamba
Laurence Cummings, Harpsichord

Jean-Marie Leclair (1697–1764)
Violin Sonatas, Book 1, Op. 1, Nos. 1–4

The violin family of instruments was born and bred in Italy and Italians were the first to exploit the violin's solo voice. In France it took much longer for the violin first to shake off its image as the instrument of the lower classes and eventually to usurp the viol's favoured position amongst the nobility. So, although a few French composers published violin sonatas before him, it was Leclair who established himself as the founder of the French School of violin playing with his four books of *Sonatas, Opp. 1, 2, 5* and *9* and his two sets of *Concertos*, *Opp. 7* and *10*.

Leclair was born in Lyon, the son of a lacemaker, and though he was brought up with his father's trade he also studied dancing and the violin. In acquiring these latter two skills together he was following the French dancing-master tradition but the years he spent in Italy inspired him to write music that brought about that fusion of the French and Italian styles, *les goûts réunis,* that was such an important aspiration of the age in which he lived.

In 1723 he came to Paris where he was fortunate to come under the patronage of one of the wealthiest men in the city, Joseph Bonnier, and this enabled him to publish this first book of violin sonatas, a publication which was received with great admiration. Leclair, however, felt that he had more to learn and Quantz tells us that in 1726 he was studying in Turin with Somis. Subsequent encounters with other virtuosi, in particular Locatelli, heavily influenced his development as both performer and composer and it is notable how much more technically adventurous his third (1734) and fourth (1743) books are. This, however, has had the unfortunate effect of the almost complete neglect of his first two books by violinists and this is a great pity because they contain such a marvellous synthesis of Italian lyricism and French elegance.

There is one composer whose influence permeates Leclair's *Op. 1*: Arcangelo Corelli. This influence is less surprising when one considers that such was the popularity of his only set of violin sonatas of 1700, *Op. 5*, that it was reprinted over fifty times in the eighteenth century. Time and again passages of certain movements recall the master yet Leclair's native French accent is always unmistakeable.

Of the twelve sonatas nine have four movements in the typical Italian *sonata da chiesa* slow-fast-slow-fast arrangement. Two have just three movements and one has five. Only three sonatas contain a complete movement in a contrasting key, though four movements have a tonic major or minor section within them, and, in general, Leclair's use of harmony is fairly conservative. The composer gives no instructions as to which instrument or instruments should play the continuo but four movements have a separate bass stave and it is clear from the style of the writing and the range employed that a viola da gamba is required alongside a harpsichord. This gives him the opportunity to give variety to repeated phrases by changing the octave at which the bass-line plays since the gamba extends to a low A, a third lower than the cello.

We do have the composer's thoughts on tempo. He was clearly irritated by some violinists who played his music too fast since he commented in Book 4 that "…by the term *Allegro* I by no means intend a movement which is very fast; I intend a gay movement…This advice is directed only to persons who may have need of it". As was typical amongst French composers, Leclair wrote out his own ornamentation, so only occasionally

has this been added to. Given the composer's background it is unsurprising that many dance movements appear in this set but it is significant that all but one have Italian titles; he clearly wanted to show where he had received much of his musical training. Ten of these sonatas, however, contain a movement in *rondeau* form and this is where the French-style music is mostly to be found, either gently lyrical and elegant or energetic and in a folk style.

Although by Italian standards this set is relatively straightforward violinistically, it contains plenty of technical challenges that were new in France. There is frequent use of up- and down-bow *staccato*, double- and triple-stopping and arpeggiated chordal sequences and even one instance of the use of the left-hand thumb, and Leclair added some fingerings to help those who might have struggled with the demands he was making.

Sonata No. 2 in C major is one of two which Leclair suggests can be played alternatively on the flute so double-stopping and chordal writing are omitted and the G string mostly avoided although in the last movement alternative versions are occasionally offered for the two instruments. The opening movement sounds like Corelli with French ornaments and the *Corrente* also has a strong French accent. The *rondeau*-form *Gavotta* is full of Gallic charm and this work is rounded off with a light-hearted *Giga*.

Both slow movements in *Sonata No. 3 in B flat major* are strongly Corellian; the *Adagio* has written out Italian-style florid ornamentation and the *Largo* is strongly reminiscent of Corelli's *Sonata No. 5* (also in G minor). The *Allegros* are humorous and energetic, the first one employing up-bow staccatos and concerto-style sequences whilst the second is an exuberant *Gavotta* in which the gamba either ornaments the bass-line or tries to compete with the violin.

Sonata No. 1 in A minor has a more serious and noble feeling, opening with music that perfectly marries the French and Italian styles. The Italianate *Allemanda* exploits the gamba's range with repeated phrases at different octaves. The wistful French-style *Aria* (*rondeau*) contains a few bars of gentle duetting for the gamba (prefiguring the *Musette* in *No. 8*) and offers opportunities for the use of the *rubato* for which Leclair was famous and the *Giga* returns to Italianate flamboyance, leaping from string to string.

Sonata No. 4 in D major, the only one with five movements, opens with a lyrical Italianate *Adagio* that is inflected with French ornaments and the *Allegro* that follows again exploits the gamba's range to the full, playing with the register. The *Andante* is the only movement in the set with an *ostinato* bass and this contrasts so beautifully with the singing violin line. The fourth and fifth movements are rustic in character with the gamba given an independent line, but whereas the *Gavotta* is energetic the *Minuetto* has a more gentle and lilting quality.

Adrian Butterfield

Adrian Butterfield

Photo: Chris Christodoulou

Adrian Butterfield is now established as one of the most versatile period-instrument musicians of his generation in Britain and abroad, working as a conductor and violinist-director with both modern and period-instrument orchestras, and as a concerto soloist, chamber musician and teacher. He is Musical Director of the Tilford Bach Festival and Associate Director of the London Handel Festival and directs ensembles such as the London Handel Orchestra, the Hanover Band and the Theatre of Early Music, Montreal across Europe and North America. Solo recordings include C.P.E. Bach *Sonatas* (ATMA), Bach's *Concerto for oboe and violin* with John Abberger (Analekta) and Handel's *Complete Violin Sonatas* (Somm). He leads the London Handel Players, whose two recent recordings, of Handel's *Op. 5 Trio Sonatas* and "*Handel at Home*" (Somm) have been highly acclaimed and also the Revolutionary Drawing Room, an ensemble which specialises in classical and romantic music on period instruments. He is Professor of Baroque Violin at the Royal College of Music. He has conducted Bach's *B minor Mass*, Handel's *La Resurrezione*, Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, Cavalieri's *Rappresentatione di Anima e Corpo* and Rameau's *Pigmalion*, and his concerto performances include numerous baroque works, Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* and *A major Concerto*, Beethoven's *Violin* and *Triple Concertos* and Vaughan Williams's *Concerto Accademico*.

Laurence Cummings

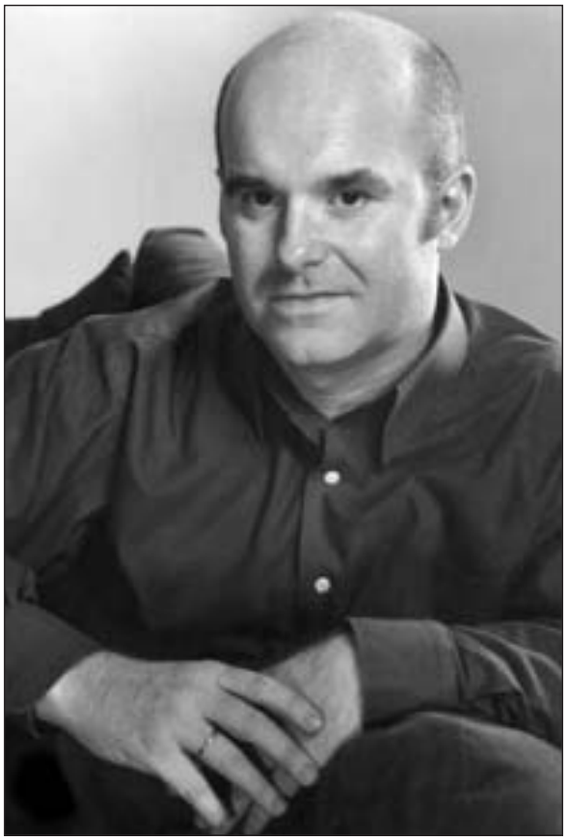

Photo: Shiela Rock

Laurence Cummings is one of Britain's most exciting and versatile exponents of historical performance both as conductor and harpsichord player. He is Music Director of the London Handel Festival, the Tilford Bach Society and a trustee of Handel House London and a founder member of the London Handel Players. He is a regular guest at Casa da Musica Porto. Opera credits include productions for English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Garsington Opera, English Touring Opera and the Linbury Theatre Covent Garden. He made his United States début conducting the Handel and Haydn Society, Boston. He regularly conducts the English Concert and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and has worked with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Jerusalem Symphony and Basel Chamber Orchestra. His numerous recordings include the first recording of Handel's newly discovered *Gloria* with Emma Kirkby on BIS and Handel arias with Angelika Kirschlager and the Basel Chamber Orchestra for Sony BMG.

Alison McGillivray

Photo: Sandrine Pasquier

Alison McGillivray was born and brought up in Glasgow. She studied cello at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama with William Conway and at the Royal Academy of Music with Jennifer Ward Clarke. She has recorded Geminiani's *Op. 5 Cello Sonatas* (Linn Records) and C.P.E. Bach's *Cello Concerto in A major* with the English Concert (Harmonia Mundi USA). She was principal cello with the English Concert and The Academy of Ancient Music, and plays with Concerto Caledonia, Concordia, The Early Opera Company and The Bach Players. During 2000 she played cello and viol in John Eliot Gardiner's Bach *Cantata Pilgrimage*. She is professor of baroque cello at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She also helps to run Katherine McGillivray's *Get a Life Fund*, a charity to fund sabbaticals for musicians: *www.getalifefund.org.uk*

Jean-Marie Leclair (1697–1764)

Sonates pour violon, Premier Livre, op. 1, n° 1–4

Le violon et sa famille d'instruments virent le jour et se développèrent en Italie, et les Italiens furent les premiers à exploiter la voix soliste du violon. En France, il mit bien plus longtemps à se débarrasser de son image d'instrument des classes inférieures et à détrôner enfin la viole, qui tenait le haut du pavé au sein de la noblesse. Ainsi, même si quelques compositeurs français publièrent des sonates pour violon avant lui, ce fut Leclair qui s'imposa comme le fondateur de l'école française d'interprétation violonistique avec ses quatre livres de *Sonates* o*pus 1, 2, 5* et *9* et ses deux recueils de *Concertos opus 7* et *10*.

Leclair naquit à Lyon, d'un père dentellier, et bien qu'il ait été formé au métier paternel, il étudia également la danse et le violon. En acquérant ces deux dernières compétences destinées au concert, il suivait la tradition française du maître à danser, mais les années qu'il passa en Italie lui inspirèrent des pages qui donnèrent lieu à la fusion des styles français et italien, les « goûts réunis », aspiration essentielle de son époque.

En 1723, il monta à Paris, où il eut la chance de se retrouver sous l'égide de l'un des hommes les plus prospères de la ville, Joseph Bonnier ; cela lui permit de publier ce premier livre de sonates pour violon, qui suscita une grande admiration. Néanmoins, Leclair sentait qu'il pouvait en apprendre davantage, et Quantz nous rapporte qu'en 1726, il se trouvait à Turin pour étudier avec Somis. Par la suite, d'autres rencontres avec des virtuoses, et notamment Locatelli, eurent une profonde influence sur son évolution d'interprète et de compositeur, et on remarquera combien ses troisième (1734) et quatrième (1743) livres sont plus aventureux du point de vue de la technique, avec comme effet regrettable d'avoir presque fait oublier les deux premiers livres aux violonistes, ce qui est fort dommage car ils constituent une merveilleuse synthèse de lyrisme italien et d'élégance française.

Il est un compositeur dont l'influence se fait sentir dans *l'opus 1* de Leclair : il s'agit d'Arcangelo Corelli. Cette influence est moins surprenante si on considère l'immense popularité de son unique recueil de sonates pour violon de 1700, *l'opus 5* : celui-ci fut réédité plus de cinquante fois au cours du XVIIIè siècle. A bien des reprises, les passages de certains mouvements rappellent le maître, mais sans que l'on puisse jamais se méprendre sur le caractère bien français de Leclair.

Neuf des douze sonates comportent quatre mouvements, selon le schéma italien lent-rapide-lent-rapide typique de la *sonata da chiesa*. Deux autres ont seulement trois mouvements et l'une en a cinq. Seules trois sonates contiennent un mouvement complet dans une tonalité contrastée, bien que quatre mouvements renferment une section dans la tonique majeure ou mineure, et en règle générale, Leclair emploie l'harmonie d'une manière relativement conformiste. Le compositeur n'indique pas le ou les instruments du continuo, mais quatre mouvements présentent une portée de basse séparée et pour des raisons de style d'écriture et de tessiture, il est évident qu'une viole de gambe et un clavecin sont requis. Cela permet plus de diversité dans des phrases répétées en changeant l'octave à laquelle est jouée la ligne de basse, la viole de gambe descendant jusqu'au la grave, une tierce en dessous du violoncelle.

On en sait plus sur la façon dont le compositeur concevait les tempi. Il était manifestement irrité par certains violonistes qui jouaient sa musique trop vite, car il soulignait dans le Quatrième Livre que par le terme *Allegro*, il ne voulait absolument pas dire que le

mouvement devait être très rapide, simplement joyeux, et il précisait ensuite que ce conseil s'adressait uniquement à ceux qui se sentaient concernés. Comme le voulait la coutume chez les compositeurs français, Leclair rédigeait sa propre ornementation, aussi n'en a-t-on ajouté qu'occasionnellement. Etant donné les études menées par le compositeur, il n'est pas étonnant de trouver de nombreux mouvements de danse dans ce recueil, mais il est significatif que tous sauf un portent des titres italiens ; de toute évidence, Leclair voulait signaler où il avait suivi la majeure partie de sa formation musicale. Toutefois, dix de ces sonates contiennent un mouvement en forme de rondeau, et c'est surtout là que l'on trouvera la musique de style français, qu'elle soit tendrement lyrique et élégante ou énergique et d'accent populaire.

Bien que ce recueil soit relativement peu complexe d'un point de vue violonistique et selon les critères italiens, il n'en contient pas moins quantité de défis techniques qui à l'époque étaient nouveaux en France. On y trouve un fréquent usage du *staccato* d'archet poussé et tiré, de doubles et triples cordes et de séquences d'accords arpégés, avec même un exemple de l'utilisation du pouce de la main gauche, et Leclair ajouta quelques indications de doigtés pour secourir ceux qui auraient eu du mal à surmonter toutes ces difficultés.

La *Sonate n° 2 en ut majeur* est l'une des deux dont Leclair suggère qu'elles peuvent être jouées alternativement à la flûte, aussi omet-elle l'écriture en doubles cordes et par accords, évitant également le plus possible la corde de sol, même si le dernier mouvement propose parfois des versions alternatives pour chacun des deux instruments. Le mouvement initial rappelle Corelli avec des ornementations françaises et la *Corrente* présente elle aussi des accents nettement français. La *Gavotta* en forme de rondeau déborde de charme latin et l'ouvrage se conclut par une *Giga* enjouée.

Les deux mouvements lents de la *Sonate n° 3 en si bémol majeur* sont d'inspiration nettement corellienne ; l'*Adagio* comporte de luxuriantes ornementations de style italien et le *Largo* rappelle beaucoup la *Sonate n° 5* de Corelli (également en sol mineur). Les *Allegros* sont spirituels et énergiques, le premier comportant des staccatos poussés et des séquences de style concertant tandis que le second est une exubérante *Gavotta* dans laquelle la viole de gambe orne la ligne de basse ou essaie de rivaliser avec le violon.

La *Sonate n° 1 en la mineur* est de caractère plus sérieux et aristocratique, s'ouvrant sur une musique qui marie à la perfection les styles français et italien. L'*Allemanda* italianisante exploite la tessiture de la viole de gambe avec des phrases répétées sur différentes octaves. La mélancolique *Aria* (*rondeau*) de style français contient quelques mesures de tendre duo pour la viole de gambe (préfigurant la *Musette* du *n° 8*) et donne des occasions d'employer le *rubato* pour lequel Leclair était célèbre ; la *Giga* retrouve l'éclat italianisant, passant prestement d'une corde à l'autre.

La *Sonate n° 4 en ré majeur*, la seule à comporter cinq mouvements, débute par un *Adagio* à l'italienne lyrique tempéré par des ornementations françaises, et l'*Allegro* qui suit exploite lui aussi pleinement l'étendue de la viole de gambe, jouant avec le registre. L'*Andante* est le seul mouvement du recueil présentant un *ostinato* de basse, qui contraste magnifiquement avec la ligne de chant du violon. Les quatrième et cinquième mouvements sont de caractère rustique, la viole de gambe se voyant confier une ligne indépendante, mais alors que la *Gavotta* est énergique, le *Minuetto* présente un aspect plus tendre et berceur.

Adrian Butterfield

Traduction française de David Ylla-Somers

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LECLAIR: Violin Sonatas • Book 1: Nos. 1–4

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With his four books of Sonatas, Jean-Marie Leclair established himself as the founder of the French School of violin playing, whose elegance he enlivened with the lyricism of the Italian baroque master, Corelli. The first four from Leclair's first book of violin sonatas balance humour, flamboyance and rustic charm with many technical challenges. The artists on this recording are accomplished interpreters of early music, having performed with leading period instrument ensembles including the Hanover Band, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and The Academy of Ancient Music.

Jean-Marie LECLAIR

(1697–1764)

Violin Sonatas • Book 1: Nos. 1–4

Violin Sonata in C major, Op. 1, No. 2 — 15:04

1. Adagio — 2:57
2. Corrente: Allegro — 4:25
3. Gavotta: Grazioso — 4:22
4. Giga: Allegro — 3:20

Violin Sonata in B flat major, Op. 1, No. 3 — 14:15

5. Adagio — 2:16
6. Allegro — 4:16
7. Largo — 3:43
8. Tempo Gavotta: Allegro — 4:00

Violin Sonata in A minor, Op. 1, No. 1 — 18:52

9. Adagio — 2:18
10. Allemanda: Allegro — 5:16
11. Aria: Grazioso — 6:38
12. Giga: Allegro — 4:40

Violin Sonata in D major, Op. 1, No. 4 — 16:04

13. Adagio — 4:45
14. Allegro — 3:33
15. Andante — 1:56
16. Tempo Gavotta — 3:22
17. Minuetto — 2:28

Adrian Butterfield, Baroque Violin
Alison McGillivray, Viola da Gamba
Laurence Cummings, Harpsichord

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French School, 17th Century (Bridgeman Art Library)

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