JEAN-MARIE LECLAIR

SONATAS OP.9 NOS.2 & 7
DEUXIEME RÉCRÉATION DE MUSIQUE OP.8

THE FOUR NATIONS ENSEMBLE

ORCHID CLASSICS

Jean-Marie Leclair (1697-1764)

Sonata in E minor, Op.9 No.2 (1743) ***qui peut se jouer sur la Flute Allemande***

1	Dolce: Andante	3:27
2	Allemanda Allegro ma non tropo	5:46
3	Sarabanda: Adagio	3:02
4	Minuetto: Allegro non tropo	3:51

Deuxieme Récréation de Musique Op.8 (1737)

5	Ouverture: Gravement-Legerement	6:10
6	Forlane: pas trop vite	5:30
7	Sarabanda: Lentement	2:35
8	Menuet	2:57
9	Badinage	1:35
10	Chaconne	7:07
11	Tambourin	3:21

Sonata in G major, Op.9 No.7 (1743) ***qui peut se jouer sur la Flute Allemande***

12	Dolce: Andante	4:17
13	Allegro ma non tropo	4:10
14	Aria Affettuoso et Altro	2:19
15	Giga: Allegro moderato	4:00
		60:15

The Four Nations Ensemble
Charles Brink, traverso
Krista Bennion Feeney, violin
Loretta O'Sullivan, cello
Andrew Appel, harpsichord and director

Jean-Marie Leclair
Seduction and Rococo art

In Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' masterful and emblematic 18th-century epistolary novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the Marquise de Merteuil tickles, delights and at the same time emasculates both her sparring partner Valmont and the reader with artful, witty virtuosity. A razor-sharp, humorous image here, a play on words there, a slightly confounded expectation, an erotic allusion, a *badinage* beckons us. We lean forward to better hear each salacious detail. The Marquise compliments our intelligence even as she robs the dignity of others and threatens our humanity. She stokes a fever of egocentric entitlement in our hearts. She makes us ill while making us laugh. These are the dangers of her courtly sophistication. This is the unexpected toxin of Rococo art.

Today, our assessment of Rococo art, whether musical or visual, is a faulty one. Thinking it benign, and prettified, even insipid, we recognize the agreeable but overlook the seductive. Do we not run the danger of allowing the basic tenets of our existence to drift permanently from sight as filigree obscures virtue? So the 18th-century French philosopher Denis Diderot warned us when he wrote that the great Rococo artist François Boucher might be the greatest painter of the time—but he was also the most dishonest.

Son élégance, sa mignardise, sa galanterie romanesque, sa coquetterie, son goût, sa facilité, sa variété, son éclat, ses carnations fardées, sa débauche, doivent captiver les petits-maîtres, les petites femmes, les jeunes gens, les gens du monde, la foule de ceux qui sont étrangers au vrai goût, à la vérité, aux idées justes, à la sévérité de l'art ; comment résisteraient-ils au saillant, au libertinage, à l'éclat, aux pompons, aux tétons, aux fesses, à l'épigramme de Boucher?

(His elegance, cuteness, Romanesque gallantry, coquettishness, taste, facility, variety, virtuosity, imaginary complexions, debauchery, must captivate the little masters, little women, young people, stylish people, and the mass of those who are strangers to true taste, to the truth, to real ideas, to the severity of art; how will they resist the salacious, the libertine, the glitter, the pompons, the nipples, the buttocks, the epigram of Boucher?)

Diderot on Boucher (*Salon de 1761*)

Both Diderot and Laclos responded to Rococo art as if it were the great hazard of their times.

In this context, consider, then, the elaborated melodies of 18th-century violinist and composer Jean-Marie Leclair. A dictionary of Rococo elegance, they provide an aural manifestation of the fabrics he knew as the young son of a lace-maker. Leclair's decorated melodies supply an opportunity for the violinist or flautist to entice and seduce his audience. When well performed, his ornaments conjure up sighs and giggles, pinches and feathers, tears of melancholy and moans of pleasure. And Leclair, dedicating these works to "people of good taste," expects that the energy and tempo of each ornament will be varied to enliven an expressive intention. He is as demanding of refined interpretation as is his harpsichordist colleague François Couperin. Leclair's musical narrative offers an exquisite balance of instrumental virtuosity and sensitive rhetoric.

Yet this elegance is but one quality among many that sets Leclair apart as possibly the greatest French violin composer. His fiddle is the dance master's tool, bringing to life the court minuet and gavotte, as well as the barn dance performed by wooden-shoed peasants and a *tambourin*. Like his contemporary Jean-Philippe Rameau, Leclair's chaconne from his *Second Récréation de Musique* brings us the variety, sensuality and luxury of the grand ballet at the Royal Opera. His great fugues are never turgid, his innocent dance tunes never trite.

We offer this selection of sonatas and the *Récréation* as a tribute to Leclair as we commemorate the 250th anniversary of his death. At the age of 67, he was murdered in front of the house he had purchased in a dangerous neighbourhood of Paris. There is no question that the world admired Leclair but there is little evidence that they loved him. His prefaces present a slightly misanthropic face. He was unable to share power at court with colleagues and left. His marriage to Louise Roussel, one of France's finest music engravers, ended in rupture, and evidence suggests that he was murdered at the hand of a disgruntled nephew.

But today, two and a half centuries setting us at a safe distance from difficult aspects of his personality, Leclair, like the Marquise de Merteuil, is a most attractive and tempting dance partner or serenade singer. And so, ignore Diderot's warnings. Ignore the *déuge* that Louis XV knew was at hand. On with seduction!

© Andrew Appel

The Four Nations Ensemble

Founded in 1986, The Four Nations Ensemble brings together soloists who are leading exponents of period instrument and vocal performance to present music from the Renaissance through the Viennese Classical works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. For three decades, Four Nations has developed a leading presence on the early music scene in New York and across the USA. With a core ensemble of harpsichord or fortepiano, violin(s), flute and cello, the Ensemble explores and performs masterpieces of the 17th and 18th centuries, from trio sonata to piano trio and quartet. Four Nations has performed at major houses and series throughout the United States including The Kennedy Center and Lincoln Center. The Ensemble has participated in festivals including The Boston Early Music Festival, New York's Mostly Mozart, Amherst Festival, New Haven's International Festival of Arts & Ideas, Skaneateles Chamber Music Festival, Virginia Waterfront International Arts Festival, Chautauqua, The Indiana Early Music

Festival, The Redwoods Festival in Santa Rosa, California, and Brasilseguridade in Rio de Janeiro.

As Four Nations distinguishes itself with imaginative and innovative programming, it is not unusual for the Ensemble to unite the music of Purcell and Schönberg, Haydn with French Canadian and Cajun fiddling, François Couperin and Chinese Court Music. Such adventurous programming has led to invitations to perform at The Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater and in New York's WQXR's June Festival of Quartets at Lincoln Center and serve as the resident chamber music ensemble at New Haven's International Festival of Arts & Ideas. Four Nations appeared on the Great Performers Series in Lincoln Center's inaugural season of chamber music concerts at the Walter Reade Theater. The Ensemble's extraordinary programming was spotlighted by Chamber Music America at the 1996 CMA conference where Andrew Appel was asked to lead a seminar demonstrating the possibilities in the imaginative juxtaposition of music from very different cultures.

Considered leading exponents of original instruments, The Four Nations Ensemble often appears on "collection" and "historical music society" series such as those at the Smithsonian and the Midwest Historical Keyboard Society. The Ensemble's performance at the Yale University Collection of Musical Instruments included music by Couperin, Rameau, Debussy and Duparc on the collections' great instruments. In recognition of its dedication to unusual repertoire, Four Nations has also served as Ensemble-in-Residence at the New York Public Library's Special Collections at Lincoln Center. Four Nations' arts-in-education programmes highlight the Ensemble's commitment to bringing the joy of chamber music to diverse audiences of all ages. *Noteworthy*, the Ensemble's public school programme, allows Four Nations a week-long residency, particularly in under-served communities, with elementary or middle school children to integrate the arts into the regular curriculum. With its origins in public schools in Brooklyn and the Bronx, *Noteworthy* has allowed Four Nations to work with children in communities throughout the USA including Hudson and Woodstock, New York; Minnesota; Colorado and Texas. In 1997 Four Nations received the Columbia County Council on the Arts' Arts-in-Education Recognition Award for its work with the Hudson City School District. Featured in Musical America's 1997 International Directory and Early Music America magazine's "Early Music in the Classroom" (Fall 1998), *Noteworthy* has become a prototype for similar programmes around the USA and continues to attract support from private foundations and municipal funds in New York. In the 1998-99 academic year, Four Nations served as the Classical Music Ensemble for Lincoln Center Institute's Arts-in-Education Repertory.

In 1999, director Andrew Appel was asked to consult with the Amarillo Symphony in creating a long- term programme between the Orchestra and the Amarillo school system. Here, he worked with members of the Symphony, developing skills in communication both with teachers and students. In 1999-2000, the Ensemble held a multi-faceted residency with the Jacksonville Symphony. Along with education work in the schools, Four Nations worked with the Symphony, bringing recent ideas of early music style and performance to the musicians. Concerts included both orchestral works and chamber music.

The Ensemble has also developed special relationships with colleges and universities throughout the country giving professional workshops in performance practice and lecture demonstrations connecting classical music to the larger arena of humanities studies. Beginning with a prestigious Residency Grant from Chamber Music America, Four Nations Guest Artist Residency with King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania flourished into a special and unique relationship with King's College and surrounding communities. Four Nations received new support from Chamber Music America Ensemble Residency Grant for its work with Gettysburg College to further its work with the students, faculty and the surrounding community and most recently for work with the Spencertown Academy and the Chatham Central School System in New York State.

Four Nations has received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council for the Arts (NYSCA), New York City's Department for Youth Services and Department of Cultural Affairs. In 1998, the Ensemble received a challenge grant from NYSCA for "institutional stabilization" which has allowed Four Nations to continue its growth and increase its performance and recording activities with an administrator. For its *Handel & Venice* and *Haydn in London* touring programmes, The Four Nations Ensemble was a participant in Chamber Music America's Music Performance Program funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

The Four Nations Ensemble can be heard on ASV/Gaudeamus with which the complete trios of Johann Schobert have been released. Soprano Christine Brandes joined the Ensemble for *Handel & Porpora: The Rivals*, initiating Four Nations' "Handel Compar'd" Project. Countertenor Matthew White joined Four Nations for the second Handel Compar'd recording *Handel & Vivaldi*. *Haydn: The Battle of the Nile* and Sonatas and Cantatas of Antonio Caldara are Four Nations' last releases with ASV/Gaudeamus. This year Andrew Appel has begun a project to record Francois Couperin's harpsichord works along with this recording of Leclair's sonatas and an upcoming recording of Francesco Geminiani's opus 5 cello sonatas on Orchid Classics.

Jean-Marie Leclair
La séduction et l'art du rococo

Dans *les Liaisons Dangereuses,* le roman épistolaire de Pierre Choderlos de Laclos qui est devenu une icône emblématique du 18ème siècle, la Marquise de Merteuil séduit, enchante et dans le même temps émascule le lecteur tout autant que son partenaire et complice Valmont, et elle s'attache à le faire avec une virtuosité achevée et pleine d'esprit. Recourant tantôt à une image drôle ou acérée comme une lame de rasoir, tantôt à un jeu de mots, à une hésitation légèrement ambiguë ou à une allusion érotique, elle nous invite à entrer dans son jeu. Nous nous penchons alors et tendons l'oreille pour ne manquer aucun détail salace. La Marquise nous fait compliment de notre intelligence dans le même temps qu'elle dépouille les autres de toute dignité, neutralisant ainsi notre bienveillance. Du coup, elle allume une fièvre égocentrique dans nos cœurs. Elle nous rend malades tandis qu'elle nous fait rire. En définitive, ce sont là les dangers de sa sophistication de courtisane et le poison inattendu de l'art du Rococo.

Notre idée du rococo, aujourd'hui, qu'il soit musical ou pictural, est incomplète. En le considérant comme léger et plein de joliesse, voire insipide, nous prenons en compte ce qu'il a d'agréable mais ignorons sa dangereuse puissance de séduction. Ne courons-nous pas alors le risque d'effacer ce qu'il y a de vertueux dans nos règles de conduite, en les laissant recouvrir d'un voile ? C'est du moins ce dont le philosophe Denis Diderot nous prévient quand il écrit que si le grand artiste du rococo François Boucher est sans doute le plus grand peintre de son temps, il en est également le plus malhonnête :

Son élégance, sa mignardise, sa galanterie romanesque, sa coquetterie, son goût, sa facilité, sa variété, son éclat, ses carnations fardées, sa débauche, doivent captiver les petits-maîtres, les petites femmes, les jeunes gens, les gens du monde, la foule de ceux qui sont étrangers au vrai goût, à la vérité, aux idées justes, à la sévérité de l'art ; comment résisteraient-ils au saillant, au libertinage, à l'éclat, aux pompons, aux tétons, aux fesses, à l'épigramme de Boucher ?

Diderot on Boucher (*Salon de 1761*)

Diderot et Laclos parlent tous deux du Rococo comme s'il constituait le grand risque de leur époque.

Considérez alors dans ce même contexte du 18ème siècle les mélodies sophistiquées du violoniste et compositeur Jean-Marie Leclair. Véritable manuel d'élégance rococo, elles reproduisent dans l'univers sonore la trame des tissus dont le musicien se trouvait entouré autrefois quand il n'était encore que le jeune fils d'un dentellier. L'ornementation des mélodies de Leclair donne l'occasion au violoniste ou au flûtiste de capter l'attention du public et de le séduire. Quand elles sont bien interprétées, ces décorations évoquent des soupirs et de petits rires étouffés, des pincements discrets et des froissements de plumes, des larmes de tristesse ou des gémissements de plaisir. Et Leclair, en dédiant ses œuvres aux « gens de bon goût », s'attend à ce que l'énergie et le tempo de chaque ornement soient modulés de façon à nourrir l'expression d'un sentiment bien précis. Il exige une interprétation aussi fine que son collègue le claveciniste François Couperin. Sa phrase musicale offre un équilibre exquis entre la virtuosité instrumentale et la rhétorique des sentiments.

Pourtant cette élégance n'est qu'une des nombreuses qualités qui font peut-être de Leclair le plus grand compositeur français pour violon. Son instrument est l'outil par excellence du maître de danse, capable de donner vie au menuet et à la gavotte de cour, tout autant qu'au *tambourin* ou aux danses interprétées par des paysans en sabots dans une grange. Comme celles de son contemporain Jean-Philippe Rameau, sa chaconne dans la *Seconde Récréation de Musique* possède la variété, la sensualité et la luxuriance d'un grand ballet à l'Opéra Royal. Ses grandes fugues ne sont jamais ampoulées, et la banalité n'est jamais présente non plus dans ses rythmes de danse.

L'enregistrement de cette sélection de sonates et de la *Récréation* est un tribut offert à Leclair pour commémorer le 250ème anniversaire de sa mort. A l'âge de 67 ans, il fut assassiné devant la maison qu'il avait achetée dans un quartier dangereux de Paris. Il n'y a aucun doute que tout le monde alors l'admirait mais il n'y a que peu d'indices portant à penser qu'il était aimé. Ses préfaces sont teintées d'une légère misanthropie. Il fut incapable de s'entendre avec ses collègues de la Cour et la quitta. Son mariage avec Louise Roussel, une des meilleures graveuses de musique de France, s'acheva sur une rupture, et on est conduit à croire que son meurtre fut organisé par un neveu mécontent.

Mais aujourd'hui où une distance de deux siècles et demi nous protège de sa personnalité difficile, Leclair, comme la Marquise de Merteuil, est un partenaire de danse ou un interprète de sérénade très attrayant et attirant. Aussi, ignorez les avertissements de Diderot. Ignorez le « déluge » que sentait venir Louis XV, et que la séduction reprenne !

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Traduction français: Joseph Laurent Rapin

Recorded: St Mary's Church, Hudson NY
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Recording Engineer: David Walters
Co-Producer: Barbara Wolf

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Pitch: A=392

Instruments
Flute: after I. H. Johannes Hyaciinthus Rottenburgh (c. 1720) by Martin Wenner in 2006
Violin: Leopold Widhalm ca. 1770 Nuremburg. A gift to Four Nations from Benjamin Diamond in honour of his father Hyman Diamond. The restoration was underwritten by Jean Hamilton in honour of her parents, Marguerite Adelmann and James Phillip Hamilton
Cello: Peter Walmsley 1720's London
Harpsichord: After Johannes Ruckers by Rutkowski and Robinette 1991

Album Cover
François Boucher, 1703-1770
The Love Letter, 1750
Oil on canvas
Timken Collection, 1960.6.3, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Photo of Four Nations Ensemble:
David Rodgers Photography

Artwork Design: Ken Koch

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Reviews of ORC100026 - Francois Couperin The Tragic Muse / Andrew Appel

Appel communicates Couperin's darker musical moments with sensitivity and elan. In his reading of the Gavotte from the B-minor Suite, the dance attains the rhetoric of a tragic recitation, frozen in the amber of bar-lines. He summons a devastating grandeur in the 7th couplet of the B-minor Passacaille… Appel plays with theatrical flair.
Benjamin Katz, The American Record Guide

… a stylish, well-recorded recital.
BBC Music Magazine **

FRANÇOIS COUPERIN
THE TRAGIC MUSE
PIÈCES DE CLAVECIN
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