

Gotham Early Music Scene (GEMS) presents



Thursday May 23, 2024 1:15 pm
St Malachy's Church – The Actors' Chapel in New York City
Live Streamed to midtownconcerts.org and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com)

Caroline Nicolas & Friends

Gamba Rivalry

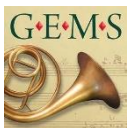
*Caroline Nicolas ~ viola da gamba Kevin Payne ~ lute
Elliot Figg ~ harpsichord*

- Pièces de Violles** Le Sieur de Machy (fl. 1655–1700)
Prélude
- Suite in D Major from *Pièces de viole, Livre 3*** Marin Marais (1656–1728)
Plainte ~ La Trompette Menuet et Double ~ Rondeau
- Suite No. 1 for Viola da Gamba and Continuo** Antoine Forqueray (1672–1745)
Allemande (La Borde) ~ La Forqueray ~ La Cottin ~
La Bellemont ~ La Portugaise ~ La Couperin
- Les Voix Humaines** Marin Marais
Suite in G Major from *Pièces de viole, Livre 3*
La Musette
- Suite No. 1 in A minor from *Pièces de viole, Livre 3*** Marin Marais
Prélude ~ Allemande ~ Courante ~ Minuet et Autre ~ Grand Ballet

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Gotham Early Music Scene, 340 Riverside Drive, Suite 1A, New York, NY 10025 (212) 866-0468
Robby Meese, Midtown Concerts Manager Kevin Devine, Midtown Concerts Assistant Manager

Toby Tadman-Little, Program Editor Paul Arents, House Manager Christina Britton Conroy, Announcer and Make-up Artist
Live stream video crew: Gene Murrow, Murat Eyuboglu, Dennis Cembalo
Naomi Morse, Director of Marketing John Thiessen, Executive Director
Harpsichord Provided by Rebecca Pechefsky



www.gemsny.org

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

At the height of Marin Marais' career, a young viol virtuoso named Antoine Forqueray exploded onto the French court musical scene. Sixteen years his junior, Forqueray's bold and contrasting musical style brought much lively speculation amongst their peers. In Hubert Le Blanc's infamous essay, "*Défense de la basse de viole contre les entreprises du violon et les prétentions du violoncel*" (1740), Marais is described as playing "like an angel" and Forqueray "like the devil".

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

With an eclectic repertory that spans from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century, acclaimed violoncellist and viola da gambist **Caroline Nicolas** enjoys an active and multifaceted career as one of the outstanding performers in her field. Noted for her "eloquent artistry and rich, vibrant sound" (*Gainesville Times*), she has been praised for her unique ability to combine emotionally rich interpretations with an historically inquisitive spirit. She regularly appears with leading ensembles as soloist, chamber musician, and music director. Ensembles which with she has worked the English Concert, Trinity Baroque Orchestra, Mercury Chamber Orchestra, Ars Lyrica Houston, Juilliard415, Harmonia Stellarum, Philharmonia Baroque, Pacific MusicWorks, Kammerorchester Basel, the New World Symphony, and Sinfonieorchester Liechtenstein. She recently completed her tenure as music director of the New Baroque Orchestra. Festival appearances include the Boston Early Music Festival, Indianapolis Early Music Festival, Bach Festival Leipzig, and Styriarte Festival in Austria. Notable venues include the KKL Luzern, Berliner Philharmonie, Alice Tully Hall, and Benaroya Hall. Her performances have been broadcast on KING FM in Washington, KUHF in Texas, WDIY in Pennsylvania, and CCTV in China. Notable collaborations include such eminent musicians as Andrea Marcon, Amandine Beyer, Kristian Bezuidenhout, Jordi Savall, William Christie, Rachel Podger, Harry Bicket, and Stephen Stubbs. More information is available at www.carolinenicolas.com.

Lutenist **Kevin Payne** is active as a recitalist, accompanist, and continuo player. Recent ensemble work includes performances with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Blue Heron, Handel and Haydn Society, and Bach Collegium San Diego. Festival appearances include Caramoor, Tanglewood, Spoleto, and Newport Classical. Performance venues include Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., the National Concert Hall in Taipei, Taiwan, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and the Festspielhaus in Baden-Baden, Germany. His playing has been broadcast on a number of nationally syndicated radio programs including "Sunday Baroque" and "Performance Today".

Elliot Figg is a keyboardist, conductor and composer from Dallas, Texas. He is a graduate of the Historical Performance Program at The Juilliard School where he studied harpsichord with Kenneth Weiss. He has also studied with Arthur Haas at the Yale School of Music. Elliot is an active member of several New York-based early music and contemporary ensembles, including ACRONYM, New York Baroque Incorporated, and New Vintage Baroque. Recent engagements include, conductor and harpsichordist for *L'Amant Anonyme* with Little Opera Theatre of New York, assistant conductor and harpsichordist for Cavalli's *Veremonda* with Spoleto Festival USA, assistant conductor and harpsichordist for *Dido and Aeneas* with L.A. Opera, and assistant conductor and harpsichordist for *Alcina* and *Orlando* with WhiteboxLab. Elliot received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in music composition from the University of North Texas where he studied composition with Cindy McTee and Joseph Klein, and harpsichord with Lenora McCroskey. His own works combine Baroque performance techniques with altered tuning systems and modern formal approaches.

Next Week: The Berwick Fiddle Consort
Money in Both Pockets

Program Notes – Gamba Rivalry

Born of humble origins, **Marin Marais** holds an unchallenged position as one of the most important viol players and composers for the instrument. He studied with Jean-Baptiste Lully and Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe. Afterward, he was hired by Louis XIV to hold the position of *ordinaire de la chambre du roy pour la viole* at the court of Versailles. Hubert LeBlanc writes it was Marais who "founded and firmly established the empire of the viol". Marais' playing was noted for its stylistic refinement and technical perfection. A brilliant pedagogue, he held high standards for his students, and demanded unusually long apprenticeships. The expectation in his studio was that his pupils would play through his entire repertory every two weeks. He abhorred Italian-style sonatas, regarding them as "unpoetic". As a composer, his works include some of the first instances of programmatic music, intended to convey specific stories or images. His most notable composition in that style is *The Bladder-Stone Operation*, which includes annotations such as "The patient is bound with silken cords" and "He screameth".

Antoine Forqueray is remembered as one of the most virtuosic viol players of his generation. While most of his compositions have been lost, it is the sheer quality of his few surviving pieces that keeps him at the center of the viol's repertory. The publication this program's suite comes from is a part of two separately issued volumes: one for the viola da gamba, and one for solo harpsichord. Noted for his flamboyant and aggressive style, the *Mercure de France* criticized Forqueray and his son for composing pieces that were "so difficult that only he and his son can execute them with grace" (1738). It seems, however, that talent didn't run in the entire family. Marin Marais spent some time teaching Forqueray's father, who, according to the *Mercure*, was "a very mediocre pupil" (1738).

Le Sieur de Machy was a viol player, composer, and pedagogue. His most notable contribution is the publication of *Pieces de violle en Musique et en Tablature* (Paris, 1685), which was France's first printed collection of music for solo viol. It consists of eight suites: four are written in tablature, and the other four in staff notation. The beginning pages open with a lengthy *avertissement*, detailing many aspects of ornamentation, technique, and interpretation. Marais' *avertissements* were likely inspired by de Machy's teachings. Strongly opinionated, de Machy engaged in a very public feud with Jean Rousseau. De Machy advocated for the viol as a polyphonic instrument, like the lute or harpsichord. Chordal playing, to him, was "the soul of music" ("*l'âme de la Musique*"). This view was so deeply entrenched that he writes that his pieces can be either played with a bow or plucked. Jean Rousseau, on the other hand, viewed the viol as primarily a melodic instrument, which he asserts in his 1688 publication, "*Reponce de Monsieur Rousseau*". De Machy's answer to this was that those who only play melodies on the viol are akin to those who play the harpsichord with only one hand.

The strong musical personalities of the composers featured on today's program continue to inspire viol players to this day. It is through their works that we experience such richness and breadth in the expressive possibilities of this beloved instrument.