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RECORDINGS



# Telemann

Paris Quartets Vol. 2: Nouveaux Quatuors  
London Handel Players



# Telemann “Paris” Quartets Volume 2

Georg Philipp Telemann was one of the most prolific composers of the 18th century and certainly one of the first great self-publishers, with an avid clientele of amateur and professional musicians eagerly awaiting the seemingly irrepressible stream of inspiration that poured from his pen. By the mid-1730s these astonishingly numerous engraved editions included the *Harmonischer Gottes-Dienst* (72 church cantatas issued by subscription), *Der getreue Music-Meister* (a fortnightly serial magazine containing vocal and instrumental pieces), 12 Fantasias each for solo flute, violin and viola da gamba, 36 Fantasies for harpsichord, the *Essercizii musici* (sonatas and trio sonatas), the *Musique de table* (containing orchestral suites, concertos, quartets, trios and sonatas), the 12 *Sonate metodiche* (Methodical Sonatas), the *Trietti methodichi e Scherzi*, the *Sonates corellisantes*, the *Six Concerts et six Suites*, and several other substantial collections of hymns, chorale preludes, cantatas and chamber music.

Of this vast output, Telemann was especially praised for his magnificent quartets. The richness and inventiveness of his first book of six *Quadri* (recorded by the London Handel Players on SOMMCD 0698) ensured that this publication was a huge success. So much so that the Parisian publisher Le Clerc brought out an edition without Telemann's permission. In an age when copyright laws did not exist this was not uncommon practice; indeed, Le Clerc brought out several other pirated editions, including Vivaldi's famous set of concertos *L'estro armonico*, Op.3.

Despite his intense schedule, with commitments at the Hamburg opera house, various churches and noble courts, Telemann's response to this act of piracy was to take eight months' leave to travel to Paris, at last fulfilling a long-held wish to accept an invitation from some of the leading French players of the day. There he produced a second set of quartets – the six *Nouveaux Quatuors* (recorded here) – which have become known in modern times as the “Paris” Quartets.

During his Parisian sojourn, lasting from late September 1737 until May 1738, Telemann stayed with the harpsichord builder Antoine Vater in the Rue du Temple. He immersed himself fully in the rich cultural life of the French capital, attending a performance of Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*, and he may well have heard the striking *Chaos* opening movement of Rebel's *Les Éléments* which was performed in March 1738.

He performed some of his own choral works, including a setting of Psalm 71 (72) – *Deus, judicium tuum* – at the Tuileries, but most significantly, at the public Concert Spirituel he presented his *Nouveaux Quatuors* with the most celebrated local musicians of the day: the flautist Blavet, violinist Guignon, viola da gamba player Forqueray the younger and a cellist simply named as Édouard. Telemann himself presided at the harpsichord. They must have been a colourful and spirited group of virtuosi.

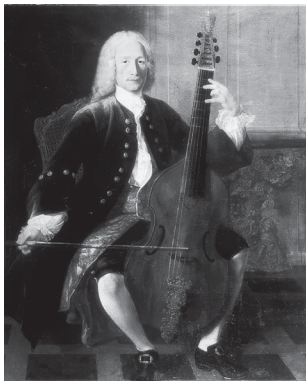


All historical references to Michel Blavet (1700–1768) describe him in glowing terms, both as a true gentleman, a kind and generous colleague and an admirable flautist, notable for his impeccable intonation even in remote tonalities. He became principal flute at the Paris Opéra orchestra in 1740, and the demanding flute parts of Rameau's operas pay tribute to his immense facility. His own compositions reflect his charming good taste and strong sense of musical phrasing and declamation, indicated by his use of breathing marks – as rare then as they are today. Blavet had subscribed to the publication of Telemann's *Musique de table* in 1733.

The violinist Jean-Pierre Guignon (1702–1774), on the other hand, was a rather more flamboyant character. Born Giovanni Pietro Ghignone in Turin, he was granted French nationality but became a controversial figure as head of the Royal Maître des Ménétriers, profiting hugely from enforced guild membership levies from understandably resentful musicians and dancing masters. He was an unwelcome rival to other leading violinists, and some have speculated that his highly competitive spirit may have implicated him in the yet unsolved murder of the great violinist, Jean-Marie Leclair.



Jean-Baptiste Forqueray (1699–1782) also had a tempestuous background. His renowned father, the viol player Antoine Forqueray (1672–1745), demanded that his son follow in his footsteps, insisting on gruellingly high standards, and yet, on account of his jealousy, he ultimately had him imprisoned and temporarily banished from France.



The performances given by this stellar team won Telemann's highest praise: "words are not enough... suffice it to say, they attracted the unusually keen attention of the court and the city, and in a short time earned me almost universal esteem, accompanied by abundant courtesy". Paris was taken by storm, and the news of these quartets spread far and wide.

Subscribers to the publication hailed from all over Europe, the majority from France and Germany, but many from as far afield as Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Belgium, Netherlands, England, Sweden, Denmark, Latvia, Poland and Russia.

Alongside numerous members of the French nobility – counts, marquises, dukes, the Prince of Conti, and Mr Le Président de Tunis – the subscribers included notable musicians such as Charpentier, Mondonville, Caix d'Hervelois, Naudot, Fasch, Pisendel and a certain Mr Bach of Leipzig.

All the musicians who premiered the works are listed as subscribers, and it is interesting to speculate what else Telemann might have played with them, or whether they discussed such topics as composition or performance styles, during their eight-month acquaintance.

His recent publication of the Methodical Sonatas must surely have exchanged hands, as there is one movement in Blavet's 1740 publication of Flute Sonatas, Op.3 in which the written-out ornamented repeats show the distinct influence of the great visitor.

Such reverential respect was richly deserved; the *Nouveaux Quatuors* themselves are some of the finest examples of baroque chamber music. The set comprises six suites, each with six or seven movements. Like the earlier set of *Quadri*, the works are scored for flute, violin, viola da gamba and continuo, with an optional adaptation of the gamba part for cello – although the third solo part's wide range, its dual treble and bass roles and its chordal writing underline that it was originally conceived for the gamba.

Here too, the writing is at times richly contrapuntal, charmingly conversational and overtly soloistic. The flute and viola da gamba feature in concerto-like opening movements in the A minor and B minor quartets (①:⑦ I. Allègement and ②:① I. Prélude: Vivement), and the violin has cadenza-like passages in the "À discrétion" opening of the E minor quartet (②:⑬). Telemann exploits countless ways of combining the instruments and creates a huge variety of textures. There are passages where one instrument takes the foreground, either in a bravura solo or a lyrical melody, and the other two upper parts confer with each other between phrases or support as accompanists.

During the many central "trio" sections where the bass line drops out, such as in the haunting middle section of the fourth movement of the A major quartet (②:⑩ IV. Modéré), Telemann must have revelled in listening to the French virtuosi as a true trio. In the "trio" section of the G major's fifth movement (①:⑦ V. Modéré), the bass line contributes just token interjections, magically lifting the timbre of the whole *pianissimo* effect with isolated pizzicato notes.

Occasional double-stopping in the strings introduces yet more voices. This is particularly effective when imitating the pungent tones of Polish bagpipes (again, ①:17 V. Modéré) or the vibrant drones of the hurdy-gurdy (rondeau theme of ①:19 III. Gracieusement) or the sweet sound of the French musette (a B major drone in the middle of ②:3 III. Gai) – both folk instruments so beloved by the French nobility. (Marie Leszczyńska, Louis XV's Polish queen, played the hurdy-gurdy.)

One quintessentially French feature is the unison writing, where flute and violin play whole melodies together *en symphonie*. Yet even here, Telemann explores a variety of options. By scoring gamba and continuo lines also in unison at the same time, he created a tender delicacy in the opening of the A minor Flatteusement (①:8) and a dense, cold sparseness in the B minor Gai (②:3) and the D major Modérément (①:5). In the A minor Coulant (①:12), a richer unison sonority is achieved by placing the flute an octave higher than the violin, which becomes particularly dark and mysterious in the central reiteration of the rondeau theme when both parts drop down an octave into their low registers. Telemann sometimes reduced the number of voices to the bare minimum, for example in the two final variations of the same A minor Coulant, where the violin accompanies the flute, then in turn is accompanied by the gamba.

All the movements of these quartets have French titles, some typically characteristic, such as Tendrement, Gracieusement, Gaiment, Vite, others less familiar, such as Coulant (flowing) or Distrait (distracted). Apart from one named dance – the Menuet in the B minor quartet (②:6) – there are a wealth of other French dances not named as such but obvious to music lovers at that time, amongst whom French dancing was so fashionable.

Typical dances of French origin include nimble bourrées (①:③ III. Vite, ①:⑭ II. Légèrement, ②:⑫ VI. Un peu gai), two gavottes, one elegant (②:⑭ II. Gai) and one earthy (②:④ IV. Vite), and a hearty rigaudon (①:⑫ VI. Gai), as well as the passepied-inspired fast section of the French overture opening movement of the E minor quartet (②:⑬), with its cheeky syncopations and unexpected 3/4 hemiolas over two bars in the 3/8 time signature. Then there are lively gigue (①:⑥ VI. Vite, ②:③ III. Gai) and a light-hearted *canarie* (①:⑩ IV. Vite), in which the central section takes on a more Corellian form with sequences of suspensions over a running bass line.

Although there is so much written for the French taste and a skilful fusion of German and Italian styles, Telemann also clearly rejoiced in the Polish style which had so captivated him as a young man; the Modéré of the G major quartet (①:⑰) and the Pas vite in the A major (②:⑪) are alluring examples of proud polonaises, whilst the first (duple-time) Modéré of the A major (②:⑨) also bears these characteristics.

Alongside movements of magical awakening (①:① I. Prélude: Vivement), graceful charm (①:⑫ III. Gracieusement), tender lyricism (①:② II. Tendrement) and deep pathos (②:⑤ V. Triste) there are moments of great comedy, as in the comic passing around of the baton in the central section of the third movement of the fifth quartet (②:⑨), and a playful chase (②:⑫ VI. Un peu gai) in which the the flute darts about, with the violin in hot pursuit. Rhetorically, the final E minor quartet rounds off the set with three movements to arouse the passions: the beguiling Gracieusement (②:⑩) in the style of a loure (traditionally associated with love and sorcery) is followed by the supremely virtuosic Distrain (②:⑰) and another Modéré (②:⑧) in the form of a grand passacaille.

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**London Handel Players**

Praised by the *New York Times* for their “soulful depth” and its “consummate skill and musicianship”, the **London Handel Players** have thrilled audiences across the world for over a quarter of a century with their performances and recordings. Established in 2000, the Players appear regularly at leading venues and festivals in the UK, Europe and North America, performing baroque chamber music and concertos and collaborating with the world’s leading singers.

The ensemble has performed across North America, making its New York debut at the Frick Collection in 2012 and returning to perform at Carnegie Hall in 2014 as well as making numerous appearances in Canada. They feature regularly at Wigmore Hall, and their touring schedule has included appearances at the International Handel Festivals in both Göttingen and Halle in Germany, as well as performances in France, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Turkey, Serbia and Croatia. Committed educators at every level, serving in Historical Performance professorships at London’s conservatoires, the London Handel Players give numerous masterclasses and workshops.

Their critically acclaimed discography includes four discs of Handel chamber music: his Trio Sonatas Op.2 (SOMMCD 084) and Op.5 (SOMMCD 044), his Complete Sonatas and Works for Violin & Continuo (SOMMCD 068) and a disc titled *Handel at Home* (SOMMCD 055). They have also recorded two-disc sets of Geminiani’s Complete Sonatas Op.1 (SOMMCD 248-2) and J.S. Bach’s Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord (SOMMCD 0664-2), as well as Flute Sonatas and Arias by Bach for Uppernote Recordings. Their second disc of Handel aria arrangements, titled *Total Eclipse (Handel at Home Vol. 2)* (SOMMCD 0676), was released in 2023 and received widespread praise. In 2025 SOMM issued the first of two volumes of Telemann’s Paris Quartets (SOMMCD 0698) and the first volume of Leclair’s Violin Concertos (SOMMCD 0711) featuring Adrian Butterfield as soloist.

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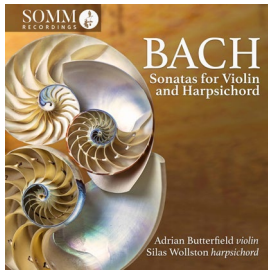
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SOMMCD 0732-2



# Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767)

## Paris Quartets Vol. 2: Nouveaux Quatuors (1738)

## London Handel Players

Rachel Brown *flute* (Martin Wenner, Singen, 2000, after Palanca, c.1750)

Adrian Butterfield *violin* (David Rubio, Cambridge, 1996,  
after Guarnerius del Gesù “Rode”, 1734)

Gavin Kibble *viola da gamba* (Ester Passiatore, Milano, 2009,  
after Romain Chéron, c.1700)

Sarah McMahon *cello* (Thomas Smith, London, c.1740)

Silas Wollston *harpsichord* (Andrew Garlick, Somerset, 2000, after Goujon, 1748)

### CD 1

#### Quatuor, TWV 43:D3 [18:04]

- ① I. Prélude: Vivement 2:34
- ② II. Tendrement 2:22
- ③ III. Vite 3:36
- ④ IV. Gaiment 3:59
- ⑤ V. Modérément 2:11
- ⑥ VI. Vite 3:19

#### Quatuor, TWV 43:a2 [20:41]

- ⑦ I. Allègrement 3:10
- ⑧ II. Flatteusement 3:41
- ⑨ III. Légèrement 2:27
- ⑩ IV. Un peu vivement 3:34
- ⑪ V. Vite 2:08
- ⑫ VI. Coulant 5:37

### 61:13

#### Quatuor, TWV 43:G4

- ⑬ I. Prélude: Un peu vnement 2:20
- ⑭ II. Légèrement 3:31
- ⑮ III. Gracieusement 2:09
- ⑯ IV. Vite 3:28
- ⑰ V. Modéré 4:20
- ⑱ VI. Gai 2:02
- ⑲ VII. Lentement – Vite 4:20

### CD 2

#### Quatuor, TWV 43:h2

- ① I. Prélude: Vivement – Flatteusement – Vivement 6:07
- ② II. Coulant 1:51
- ③ III. Gai 1:43
- ④ IV. Vite 1:41
- ⑤ V. Triste 2:50
- ⑥ VI. Menuet: Modéré 4:40

### [22:12]

#### Quatuor, TWV 43:A3

- ⑦ I. Prélude: Vivement 2:21
- ⑧ II. Gai 2:33
- ⑨ III. Modéré 4:47
- ⑩ IV. Modéré 3:45
- ⑪ V. Pas vite 2:03
- ⑫ VI. Un peu gai 2:39

#### Quatuor, TWV 43:e4

- ⑬ I. Prélude: À discrétion – Très vite – À discrétion 4:41
- ⑭ II. Gai 2:40
- ⑮ III. Vite 1:39
- ⑯ IV. Gracieusement 2:47
- ⑰ V. Distrain 3:09
- ⑱ VI. Modéré 4:44

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