

Jean-Marie
LECLAIR
Violin Sonatas • Book 3
Op. 5, Nos. 9–12

Adrian Butterfield, Violin
Sarah McMahon, Cello
Silas Wollston, Harpsichord



Jean-Marie Leclair (1697–1764)

Violin Sonatas • Book 3: Op. 5, Nos 9–12 (pub. 1734)

Jean-Marie Leclair was born in Lyon in 1697 to a lacemaker. He trained as a dancer and violinist and subsequently established himself as France's leading violinist in the 1720s with the publication of his first two books of sonatas, in 1723 and 1728, and with his dazzling performances at the Concert Spirituel. Formal recognition of his talents as both performer and composer came in 1733 when he was appointed Director of the Music of the Chapel and the Apartments by Louis XV, and he displayed his gratitude to the King by dedicating this third book of sonatas, *Op. 5*, to him in 1734. Sadly, a dispute with another violinist, Jean-Pierre Guignon, who had been appointed at the same time, led to his resignation in 1736. He subsequently worked at the court of the Princess of Orange and at the Hague in the Netherlands and then for the Duke of Gramont in Paris. His life came to a shocking end in 1764 when he was murdered. No one was formally charged for the deed, but strongest suspicion has fallen on his nephew.

This third book of violin sonatas builds on the previous two in several ways. In terms of form and use of tonality there are some developments but no radical changes. Eleven of the twelve sonatas have four movements while just one has three, and Leclair's charming mixture of Italianate lyricism and virtuosity and French sensibility and dance idioms continued to embody the aim of this fusion of styles, known as *les goûts réunis*, which was such an important aspiration of the age in which he lived. One element that is new is Leclair's use of variation form in three of the final movements, a convention that was to become particularly popular in the second half of the 18th century. His use of tonality is wonderfully expressive but still relatively conservative and within each sonata he rarely diverges far from the tonic major or minor or relative major or minor. He is more inclined than before, however, to change key signature during a movement and in one case (the *Adagio* of *Sonata No. 7*) to travel through a number of surprising keys.

In terms of violin technique some of the sonatas challenge the performer's dexterity to a higher degree than before. Several movements include continuous multiple-stopping, and the figurations are more intricate and complex than before. There are two *Presto* movements and two marked

Prestissimo, while the moderating markings of *ma poco* and *ma non troppo* added to *Allegro*, which were ubiquitous in the first two books, have become somewhat rarer. The second movement of *Sonata No. 9* includes almost constant undulating bow strokes on double-stopped notes. And the outer movements of *Sonata No. 8* sound like prototype concerto movements. It is surely no coincidence that Leclair's first set of six concertos was published just three years after this set, in 1737.

While it is clear from the style of writing and the range of the bass line in his first two books that Leclair had the viola da gamba in mind as the string bass instrument alongside the harpsichord, in *Book 3* the 'violoncello' is specifically mentioned in the *Ciacconna* of *Sonata No. 4* and at that point it is given a separate staff and its own line of music. This development indicates how the dominance of the gamba in France was beginning to wane and that the Italian cello was taking its place.

Leclair specified that two sonatas in *Book 1* and five in *Book 2* could be performed alternatively on the flute, no doubt with an eye to boosting sales; but none are specified in this way in *Book 3*. Perhaps he felt that he should focus exclusively on the violin in deference to Louis XV after his recent appointment as court musician. The focus on dance in French Baroque music, a legacy of Louis XIV who adored dancing, usually meant that a folk element was also never far away, as can be seen frequently in *Books 1* and *2*. But in *Book 3* almost every sonata incorporates some sort of drone moment and rustic elements appear frequently (in the last movement of *Sonata No. 10* the tonic bass note remains unchanged throughout). One wonders whether the King was especially fond of this style of music.

E major is a naturally bright key for the violin, and the opening *Andante* of *Sonata No. 9* has a gentle and luminous simplicity. A veil of cloud descends for a time during the second half as the tonality switches to the tonic minor but bright sunshine is restored by the end. The rondo that follows is a technical *tour de force* of virtuoso double-stopping and pulsating bow strokes. The dynamic markings are unusually detailed and one sequence suggests a big crescendo and

diminuendo. A tender and somewhat melancholy *Gavotte en rondeau* is followed by a cheerful *Tempo Minuetto* with two charming variations.

All four movements of the tenth sonata contain folk-style drone elements. The first movement, *Largo*, has a genial lyricism, the violin providing internal pedal points at the beginning of each half, and the *Allegro assai* that follows also has a sunny mood with a busy dialogue between treble and bass and a strong cadenza-like pedal section towards the end. The third movement is a rondo that is very intimate and tender in character with two couplets that blossom gently before softening at each return. The *Tambourin* that concludes this sonata could hardly be more rustic, since the whole dance is based on a single, repeated tonic pedal. Having performed this movement a number of times with Clare Salaman playing the hurdy-gurdy I was delighted that she was able to join us for this recording.

The first movement of the *Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 11* is rather like a swan, with the violin gliding serenely across the still waters and the bass line working busily under the surface! The roles are reversed in the second movement *Allegro* which is an energetic *moto perpetuo* for the violin with a very simple bass accompaniment. The *Largo* that follows is a gentle and beautifully lyrical *siciliana* in E flat major, more optimistic in mood than the one in *Sonata No. 8*, while the finale is a lively Italian *giga*, the regular flow of which is briefly interrupted towards the end before normal service is resumed, the violin part tumbling down to its lowest note to finish.

Sonata No. 12 is one of the most technically challenging of the set and also provides some reminders of Corelli's influence

on Leclair's musical upbringing. The opening G major *Adagio* is mostly lyrical, though there are occasional interruptions from French overture-style dotted rhythms. For almost the entire movement the violin part is written in multiple-stopping, but there are also written out Corelli-style roulades of ornamental notes and a brief notated cadenza on the chord with a pause just before the conclusion. As in *Books 1* and *2* the second movement of the final sonata is a fugue. Although this one has many of the hallmarks of Corelli, it is larger in scale than those of his mentor and includes a substantial section in the tonic minor before returning to G major for its grand conclusion. The third movement *Largo*, in the relative minor key of E minor, is one of those rare movements in which Leclair speaks in an utterly idiomatic Italian accent without betraying any hint of his French upbringing; this movement would slot seamlessly into Corelli's *Op. 5* sonatas.

The final movement of *Book 3* is a grand and joyous virtuoso *chaconne*. The eight-bar theme, which is made up of two slightly varied four-bar phrases, is performed twice at the beginning and returns three times through the movement, while the *couplets* are mostly made up of regularly repeated four-bar variations. For contrast, the tonality shifts to the tonic minor in the middle section; here the mood becomes darker and Leclair provides a drone using the violin's lowest open string. After the return of G major and further busy variations there is one more Corellian touch, a final serene repeat of the theme, concluding this sonata and the whole set quietly and calmly.

Adrian Butterfield

Photo: © Ruth Keating



Clare Salaman (1967–2022)

Clare Salaman was a multi-instrumentalist specialising in unusual stringed instruments, and was director of The Society of Strange and Ancient Instruments (SSAI). Her practice included historically informed performance, collaborations with musicians and artists from the UK and abroad, recording sessions for film and television soundtracks and teaching at the Royal College of Music and the Norwegian Academy of Music. She wrote and presented three programmes for BBC Radio 3's *Early Music Show*, and during recent years had been involved in researching and reconstructing the trumpet marine as part of a PhD and the SSAI's performance project.

Clare passed away early in 2022 after a long illness. She was a special friend and an inspiring musician and I miss her terribly – AB.

Photo: © Chris Christodoulou



Adrian Butterfield

Adrian Butterfield is a UK-based period-instrument violinist, director and conductor who appears regularly at Wigmore Hall and across the world. He is musical director of the Tilford Bach Festival, associate director of the London Handel Festival and frequently conducts and directs the London Handel Orchestra and Players as well as working as a guest director in Europe and North America. London Handel Players made their debut at Carnegie Hall in 2014 and return to North America regularly. He leads the gut-string quartet, the Revolutionary Drawing Room, and is professor of Baroque violin at the Royal College of Music in London. He also works annually with the Southbank Sinfonia, gives masterclasses internationally and has taught on summer courses in several countries. He has conducted all the major choral works of Bach as well as numerous works by Handel and his contemporaries and directed ensembles such as the Croatian Baroque Ensemble in Zagreb, the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Mozart Players. www.adrianbutterfield.com

Photo: © Stephen Page



Sarah McMahon

Irish cellist Sarah McMahon enjoys a varied career as principal cellist with the Academy of Ancient Music, Irish Baroque Orchestra, Ensemble Marsyas and Camerata Kilkenny, collaborating closely with Peter Whelan, Malcolm Proud, Laurence Cummings and Richard Egarr among others. She also regularly plays as guest principal with the London Handel Orchestra, Florilegium, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Arcangelo and Dunedin Consort. She is a founding member of the Callino Quartet, and the group's recording of Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross* was met with critical acclaim. Their collaboration with Canadian filmmaker Kaveh Nabatian premiered at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam in 2019 and toured festivals in Montreal, Kerala, Bilbao and Edinburgh. McMahon is professor of historical cello at the Royal College of Music in London and Berwick Academy at the University of Oregon. She gratefully acknowledges support from Music Network and Arts Council of Ireland through their Capital Award scheme.

Photo: © Tim Gander



Silas Wollston

Recognised as a leading early music specialist, Silas Wollston combines performance and academic research in a varied career. He studied the organ with John Scott before taking up an organ scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge. He then went on to study harpsichord and fortepiano at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Conservatoire Royale in Brussels. A longstanding member of the English Baroque Soloists, he played a major role in Sir John Eliot Gardiner's Bach cantatas cycle in 2000, performing the organ *obbligato* of BWV 146 on the Trost organ in Altenburg. He also has significant experience as a choral director, working as director of music at Queen's College, Cambridge between 2011 and 2015. He has published research on the string music of Locke and Purcell, and on Handel's compositional process. He is a member of the London Handel Players, The Bach Players, and the ensemble In Echo.

Jean-Marie Leclair was a master of fusing Italian and French idioms, conjoining the lyricism of the former with the dance momentum of the latter. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in his third book of violin sonatas. The sonatas in this album embody rich melodic beauty, drone and rustic elements – most vividly in the *Tambourin* of the C major sonata in which a hurdy-gurdy is employed – and demand *tour de force* virtuosity such as in the joyous *Ciaccona* of the G major sonata. Described by *Gramophone* as ‘technically and musically a marvel’ (Naxos 8.572866), Adrian Butterfield completes his acclaimed traversal of Leclair’s *Violin Sonatas Books Nos. 1–3*.

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Violin Sonata in E major, Op. 5, No. 9		Violin Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 11	
	15:33		15:47
1 I. Andante	4:54	9 I. Andante	5:34
2 II. Allegro	3:55	10 II. Allegro	3:28
3 III. Gavotta: Gratoso	2:12	11 III. Largo	3:44
4 IV. Tempo Minuetto ma non troppo	4:28	12 IV. Giga: Allegro ma non troppo	2:57
Violin Sonata in C major, Op. 5, No. 10		Violin Sonata in G major, Op. 5, No. 12	
	14:33		18:10
5 I. Largo	4:57	13 I. Adagio	3:43
6 II. Allegro assai	4:20	14 II. Allegro ma non troppo	3:58
7 III. Aria: Andante	3:11	15 III. Largo	3:54
8 IV. Tambourin: Presto	1:58	16 IV. Ciaccona	6:31

Adrian Butterfield, Violin
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Clare Salaman, Hurdy-gurdy 8

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Nicolas-Jean-Baptiste Raguenet (1715–1793) / Musée Carnavalet, Paris