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Les Folies d'Espagne AND THE EUPHONIUM PLAYER

MING LI GOLDSTON
MENTOR: Dr. David Nabb

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how a transcription of *Les Folies d'Espagne*, a 17th century *viola da gamba* work by French Baroque composer Marin Marais, was constructed for the euphonium, a brass instrument which emerged a century-and-a-half later. Philippe Fritsch, the arranger of the 2002 euphonium transcription, made several notable departures from Marais's source material—the most obvious being the omission of twenty of the original thirty-two variations. Fritsch's arrangement is considered through the lenses of Marais's compositional purposes and context, the removal of the euphonium from the antiquated *viola da gamba*, and the pedagogical significance Marais's work would have for euphonium players today.

INTRODUCTION

Marin Marais (c. 1656—1728) is one of the most significant French instrumentalists and composers in the Western art music tradition. A renowned *viola da gamba* player during the Baroque era, Marais was widely regarded across Europe as the “central figure of the French School of bass viol performer-composers that burgeoned in Paris during the late [seventeenth] and early [eighteenth] centuries” (Paull, “*Les Folies d'Espagne: Hautbois d'amour et basse continue*”). In his lifetime, Marais was celebrated for his remarkable technique and was recognized as the first French instrumentalist to make a name for himself as a solo performer (Gorce & Milliot 2). Today, he is remembered as an exceptional figure in the development of the Baroque *viola da gamba*, of French musical style, and of French national identity in general (2).

One of Marais' most enduring works today is a series of thirty-two continuous variations on a simple theme—originally arranged for solo *viola da gamba* and basso continuo—titled *Les Folies d'Espagne*, although it is also known as *Couplets de Folie* or *La Folia*. The piece has been transcribed numerous times since its first publication. In fact, in Marais' “Foreword” to the original collection of *Les Folies d'Espagne* appears, he writes:

I have taken great care to compose [these variations] in such a manner that they can be played by all kinds of instruments, amongst them organ, harpsichord, lute, violin, and flute. I venture to declare that this plan has succeeded, since I have played them out on both the latter instruments myself. (Marin Marais, as qtd. in Paull, “*Les Folies d'Espagne: Hautbois d'amour et basse continue*”)

Incidentally, the euphonium was not amongst the instruments that Marais considered in the seventeenth century. The euphonium, whose name is derived from the Greek *euphonos*, or “sweet sounding,” is a piston-valved, conical-bored aerophone in the low-brass family; it was not invented until the early 1840s by Sommer of Weimar (Bevan 1). Since its invention, however, the euphonium has only gained tremendous popularity as both an ensemble and solo instrument. It has become a standard instrument in band literature, fulfilling a number of roles within the ensemble and regularly being featured for its versatility and rich color; similarly, it has one of the most

important roles in music of the brass band tradition, particularly in Great Britain. It is also gaining prominence in orchestral and jazz literature too. Today, there are major international organizations of professional euphonium performers and pedagogues with growing communities and publications, such as the International Tuba Euphonium Association (ITEA).

Nevertheless, the euphonium is a relatively young instrument with far less history and solo literature written for it compared to the instruments Marais was familiar with and writing for. It was not until 2002, when French-born arranger Philippe Fritsch published his transcription of the Marais that euphonium players would have an edition of *Les Folies d'Espagne* available specifically for their instrument. However, Fritsch deliberately chose not to transcribe the piece in its entirety. In his transcription, which he titled *La Folia*, Fritsch adapted just twelve of the original thirty-two variations and arranged them into stand-alone movements with piano accompaniment. He also made additional changes to the individual movements to create an adaptation that is particularly suited to euphonium performance.

Fritsch's editorial decisions in his euphonium arrangement bring to mind interesting questions: Firstly, why did Fritsch use only a handful of the original thirty-two variations when they were originally intended to be played as a large continuous set? Secondly, what is the significance of Marais' *viola da gamba* piece for a euphonium player's study, when the piece and its original instrument long predate the invention of the euphonium? Finally, why is *Les Folies d'Espagne* in fact a fitting piece for euphonium players to study or play?

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON MARAIS

Marin Marais was born in Paris, France as the son of a humble shoemaker, Vincent Marais (Gorce & Milliot 1). He was baptized on May 31, 1656 and attended the choir school of *St. Germain-l'Auxerrois* from 1667 to 1672, where he received a strong foundational music education from François Chaperon (1). Soon after, Marais went on to study opera with Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632—1687) and *viola da gamba* with Jean de Sainte-Colombe (c. 1640—1700) (2). Marais was a virtuosic player, supposedly surpassing his teacher Saint-Colombe after just six months of tutelage (2). As an instrumentalist, Marais is described reverently:

His pleasing tone had a rare power, thanks to an 'airy' style of playing which made full use of open strings and their harmonics. However, his virtuosity always took second place to his musicality. His performances, full of charm and 'fire', captivated his contemporaries, who said that he played 'like an angel'. Composer and performer were closely linked. (2)

Marais spent his entire life and musical career in Paris, primarily in royal service under King Louis XIV (Paull, "*Les Folies d'Espagne: Hautbois d'amour et basse continue*"). Musicologist Julie Anne Vertrees Sadie describes Marais as having "technical perfection and stylistic refinement... [that] reveal[ed] little of the man" (672). Indeed, little is known about Marais' personal life, other than that he married Catherine d'Amicourt in 1676 and had nineteen children with her (Paull, "*Les Folies d'Espagne: Hautbois d'amour et basse continue*"). Nevertheless, Marais was considered to be among the "ultimate miniaturists and exponents of the French style" (Sadie 673). Undoubtedly, he was dedicated to crafting and refining a uniquely French sound and identity in the Baroque era which would have lasting impacts on his contemporaries and on future generations (Gorce & Milliot 1).

Marais began playing in the royal opera orchestras of Paris under Lully in 1675 (1). In 1679, he was appointed as *Ordinaire de la musique de la chambre du roi* (1). He continued his court service until 1725 (Paull, “*Les Folies d’Espagne: Hautbois d’amour et basse continue*”). Soon after his court appointment began, Marais also started composing music and teaching to supplement his income and support his large family; he settled in the area of *Saint-André-des-Arts* in Paris, where he remained until his death on August 15, 1728 (Sadie 672). Under Lully, Marais had excellent operatic and orchestral training, so he found much success during his lifetime as a composer. His music was well-received by his contemporaries, and he published numerous works, including five collections of pieces for *viola da gamba*, numerous suites and motets, and four operas, which were among his greatest successes (Gorce & Milliot 1).

In 1686, Marais completed his first book of pieces for *viola da gamba* (Sadie 674). *Les Folies d’Espagne* is featured in his second book of pieces for *viola da gamba*, published in 1701 (The Purcell Quartet, CD). According to Sadie, these collected works “sum up the achievements of seventeenth century viol playing” (674). Marais was foremost a virtuoso performer during his career, and his ingenuity and keen sense are seen in the demand and efficacy of his writing. He composed around 550 pieces for *viola da gamba*, “exploring every resource of the instrument and its player’s technique” (Wood 668). Unfortunately, after his lifetime, Marais was actually largely forgotten about as a composer until the late nineteenth century, when his music was rediscovered, and transcriptions of his works started being published again (Sadie 672). Since then, numerous transcriptions of his works, and especially of *Les Folies d’Espagne*, have been published and performed, once again bringing attention to this famed *viola da gamba* virtuoso and pioneer of Baroque French musical identity, which consisted of “grandeur without ostentation, virtuosity without vanity and sensitivity without exaggeration” (Gorce & Milliot 2).

HISTORY CONTEXT FOR *LES FOLIES D’ESPAGNE*

In the Baroque era, a *folia* refers to a musical framework for certain songs, dances, or sets of variations (Germino & Silbiger 1). An earlier dance form known as *folia* was popular in late fifteenth century Portugal, supposedly originating from folk dance (1). *Folia* translates literally as “mad” or “empty-headed” and thus made an appropriate name for a dance that “was so fast and noisy that the dancers seemed out of their minds” (1). Originally, *folia* were characterized by their “popular tone and a metrical form [of] a refrain of two, three or four lines” and by their energy and quick tempo (1). However, by the late seventeenth century, a new style of *folia* emerged, specifically in France. Marais’ mentor, Lully, who had served as *Surintendant de la musique de la chambre du roi* in his time in the French court, embodied that distinctly French style which set the new *folia* apart (Gorce 3). The new *folia* he helped pioneer is described as possessing:

A distinctive local idiom... the new [*folia*] structure developed by Lully and his French colleagues remained popular in France and England until the end of the Baroque period... The later *folia* [have] no ritornellos, [are] almost always in D minor... and [are] generally slow and dignified. (Germino and Silbiger 5)

Marais’ adaptation of *Les Folies d’Espagne* also follows suit of the French style. He composed them in theme and variations form, with each of the continuous variations being referred to as a “couplet” (which is why the piece is sometimes called *Couplets de Folie*). In literary terms, a “couplet” refers to two consecutive lines of poetry which rhyme, and which often have the same meter and rhythm. The initial D minor theme is a simple sixteen-bar idea, divided into two eight-bar phrases that rhyme and that are largely identical, varying only at the cadence point. From there,

each of the following variations maintains the same general harmonic form, simply using ornamentations and other stylistically appropriate decorations to elaborate upon the theme (see musical example 1).

Musical example 1:

LES FOLIES D'ESPAGNE
32 Variations for Viola da Gamba & Basso Continuo (1701)
by Marin Marais

transcribed by Alan Bonds

Marais Les Folies d'Espagne, theme, mm. 1-16 (Bonds)

MARAIS' COMPOSITIONAL STYLE AND APPROACH

As previously stated, Marais' compositional style and approach was heavily influenced by his teacher, Jean-Baptiste Lully. Marais' compositions and technique are characterized by the distinctly French Baroque style that Lully, he, and other court composers of his era were trying to establish and elevate (Gorce & Milliot 2). According to music reviewer Caroline Wood, Marais perfectly paired the “‘grace and balance’ [that he had] learned from studying opera composition with Lully, [while also making] his own name ‘in the richness of [his] harmony and ornamentation’” (668). As seen in many of Marais' compositions for *viola da gamba*, there is a lot of attention and emphasis on creating an appropriately stylistic performance, especially regarding decisions about ornamentations (i.e., what kinds and how to use them).

Of course, Marais set the standards for *viola da gamba* ornamentation and performance in many ways, particularly in *Les Folies d'Espagne*. He was capable of expressing an “extensive range of moods and ambience within the work” (Paull, “*Les Folies d'Espagne: Hautbois d'amour et basse continue*”). According to harpsichordist Kah-Ming Ng, ornaments in the French Baroque style were intended “to provide shape and character to the melody. To sing or play *proprement* [or “properly”] is to execute French melody with the ornaments that suit it” (31). Therefore, there were unspoken expectations of how a player would approach and execute ornamentations in their performance; composers such as Lully were notoriously strict about how their compositions would have been performed (Ng 32).

In addition, Marais also well integrated the basso continuo part with the solo part to be able to make full use of the *viola da gamba*'s “superior chordal possibilities” (The Purcell Quartet, CD). The variations call for “stunning bowed trills [and an] immediate response to each change of

mood” (Smith 346). Often, throughout the piece, in the spirit of the original culture and setting of the dances, *Les Folies d'Espagne* was imbued “with Hispanic flair, hinting occasionally at guitar strumming” (The Purcell Quartet, CD). Clearly, many different effectual techniques to mimic these musical qualities are called for in this piece.

ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF FRITSCH ARRANGEMENT

Although Marais admitted his own intentions for *Les Folies d'Espagne* to be appropriate for a variety of instruments to perform, it is evident from a performer’s perspective that the piece is still best suited for the most virtuosic of viol players. The *viola da gamba* is a seven-stringed, bowed bass instrument dating back to the late Renaissance (The Purcell Quartet, CD). Contrarily, the euphonium is a piston-valved, tenor-voiced aerophone that was developed in the mid-nineteenth century. Because of these tremendous differences in the physical instruments, in how they are played, and in their cross-adaptability in regard to playing technique, Fritsch really had his work cut out for him in his euphonium transcription. His work was no small feat, and his results more than challenging to learn and perform.

In Fritsch’s arrangement, he changed the written key from D minor to C minor to better support the euphonium’s range. Interestingly enough, most modern *viola da gamba* performances of *Les Folies d'Espagne* are executed using A=392 Hz for tuning. Written D minor in this *temprement ordinaire* would sound like D \flat minor compared to our modern tuning of A=440Hz (The Purcell Quartet, CD). The euphonium is a non-transposing instrument, so in our modern equal-temperament tuning, any written key would sound the same. However, the saxhorn in Si \flat (a relative of the euphonium that is popular today in France; it is common for music written for euphonium to also include parts for saxhorn and vice versa) is a B \flat transposing instrument, and thus would be written in D minor, just as the original Marais would have been (despite the difference in tuning customs). Fritsch probably also took these transposition qualities into consideration for his transcription (see musical example 2).

Musical example 2:

LA FOLIA

original pour viole de gambe et basse continue
original for viola da gamba and continuo

pour euphonium ou saxhorn (♯) en si \flat ou ut et piano ou clavecin
for euphonium or saxhorn (♯) in B \flat or in C and piano or harpsichord

Degré : difficile (8)
Grade : advanced (8)

Durée totale : 6 mn
Length :

Transcription et réalisation :
Edited by :
Philippe FRITSCH

Marin MARAIS
(1656 - 1728)

EUPHONIUM ou SAXHORN en UT

Thème

La Folia, euphonium transcription, theme, mm. 1-16 (Fritsch)

Other than the key, the biggest change in Fritsch's arrangement is that he only included twelve variations and that they are not continuous. The most obvious reason for shortening the arrangement is because the euphonium is a large brass instrument requiring a lot of wind, so playing the entire piece (which is usually around fifteen to sixteen minutes for performance time) would be too physically demanding on a soloist; Fritsch's arrangement only takes about six minutes to perform. He also omitted a lot of the ornamentations that would typically be included in transcriptions for other instruments because their execution would have been assumed—a performance practice of the time that any professional would have been expected to know. Fritsch himself is French and most likely knowledgeable of the musical traditions of the French Baroque era, so he was probably being most faithful to the style by omitting these ornamentations. After all, there was tremendous significance in performance practice back then that was central to the stylistic and national identities of these composers and performers.

So, how do the twelve variations Fritsch selected work as a whole and suit the euphonium specifically? Because of the considerations of length of performance and technical demand in making a transcription of a string piece for a brass instrument, Fritsch selected the variations that provided an appropriate mix of technical and lyrical contrast, alternating for the most part between slow and expressive and fast and lively. All of the variations are within the same range of C2 to B \flat 4, although their primary tessituras change variation to variation. Of the twelve movements of Fritsch's arrangement, the majority are very close to Marais' original couplets. The theme is of course identical. The first variation aligns with the second couplet, the second variation aligns with the third couplet, the third variation aligns with the sixteenth couplet, the fourth variation aligns with the seventeenth couplet, the fifth variation aligns with the twenty-second couplet, the

sixth variation aligns with the twenty-third couplet, the seventh variation aligns with the twenty-sixth couplet, the eighth variation aligns with the twenty-seventh couplet, the ninth variation aligns with the twenty-eighth couplet, and the thirteenth variation aligns with the thirty-second couplet. Additionally, a “final” movement was added—a restatement of the second half of the original theme to neatly close the piece, and to take the energy back down from the heights of the extremely technically-demanding twelfth and thirteenth variations. The first through nine variations and the thirteenth variations were the least altered because they were the most directly transferrable to euphonium. Despite the large intervallic leaps and very wide ranges within individual movements that make the piece very technically challenging for euphonium players, those variations were otherwise transcribed very faithfully.

Comparably, the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth variations have been the most altered to suit performance on euphonium and add variety to the previous variations and increase energy until the end of the piece. These variations deviate most from any of the original couplets, although the tenth variation aligns roughly with the twenty-ninth couplet and the eleventh and twelfth variations each have elements of the thirty-first couplet. The tenth variation differs in rhythm and pitch content slightly, but compared to any of the other couplets, the twenty-ninth was closest (see musical examples 3 and 4).

Musical example 3:

Marais Les Folies d'Espagne, variation 29, mm.1-16 (Bonds)

Musical example 4:

Variation 10

Lent et expressif
Slow and expressive

161

mp

166

171

rall.

La Folia, euphonium transcription, variation 10, mm. 161-176 (Fritsch)

Meanwhile, the eleventh and twelfth variations both have elements of the thirty-first couplet (see musical examples 6 and 7). The eleventh seems to take from the first half of the couplet and elaborate on that idea while the twelfth does the same with the second half of the couplet, as can be seen in the rhythms and general contours of both of those variations (see musical example 5).

Musical example 5:

Marais Les Folies d'Espagne, variation 31, mm.1-16 (Bonds)

Musical example 6:

Variation 11

Pas trop vite, en coup de langue
Not too fast, tonguing

G 6027 B

La Folia, euphonium transcription, variation 11, mm. 177-192 (Fritsch)

Musical example 7:

Variation 12

Très vite en coup de langue
Very fast, tonguing

cédez
holding back

La Folia, euphonium transcription, variation 12, mm. 193-208 (Fritsch)

In these variations, Fritsch appears to take the most liberties with arranging and even writing some original content because these movements would have been too difficult to execute on euphonium without such alterations. He made changes with regard to rhythm and time (i.e., length of movement) in order to make those variations more easily playable while still maintaining as much of their original integrity as possible.

CONCLUSION

Despite the changes that Fritsch made throughout his euphonium edition, his transcription remains quite challenging for the performer. Thus, there is a question as to whether euphonium players should care about this piece and composer. Because of Marais' tremendous musical influence and contributions as a French Baroque instrumentalist and composer, and because of the popularity of the *folia* theme in many other works outside of Marais' own, *Les Folies d'Espagne* is certainly a piece that any musician should know about. It has been transcribed so many times and continues to be played today because it is an incredibly important piece for the establishment of the French Baroque musical identity, for the profile of the *viola da gamba*, and for its overall musical qualities and expression. In overcoming the performance challenges of learning such a difficult piece, euphonium players gain insight into a style of music, an individual, and a period of history that was of great importance in the course of the development of the Western tradition of music. Composers such as Marais elevated the craft to new heights, demanding the highest technical skill and musical expression, which effectively pushed the entire art of music forward. And as musicians ourselves, we would also want to dedicate ourselves so steadfastly to a bettering of our art, of our own abilities, and of our musicianship. Marin Marais' *Les Folies d'Espagne* and Philippe Fritsch's euphonium transcription of the work provide euphonium players with such an opportunity.

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