

Gotham Early Music Scene (GEMS) presents



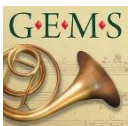
Thursday December 2, 2021 1:15 pm
The Church of the Transfiguration in NYC
Live Streamed to midtownconcerts.org and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com)

Caroline Nicolas ~ baroque cello and viola da gamba
Kevin Payne ~ theorbo and lute
Bassi in dialogo

Captain Humes Pavan from "The First Part of Ayres, French, Polish and Others" (No. 47)	Tobias Hume (1569–1645)
Canzon Prima à basso solo, F 8.06C	Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643)
Prelude	Robert de Visée (1650–1725)
Suite from "Pièces de viole, Livre 3" Prelude ~ Allemande ~ Gigue	Marin Marais (1656–1728)
Passacaglia	Alessandro Piccinini (1566–1638)
Largetto from Sonata VI, Livre II	Jean-Baptiste Barrière (1707–1747)
Sonata a violoncello solo, con il Basso Continuo Grave ~ Allegro ~ Largo ~ Prestissimo	Domenico Gabrielli (1659–1690)
Cello Sonata, RV 44 Largo ~ Allegro poco ~ Largo ~ Allegro	Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)
Les Voix Humaines from "Pièces de viole, Livre 3" (No. 63)	Marin Marais

Midtown Concerts are produced by Gotham Early Music Scene, Inc., and are made possible with support from The Church of the Transfiguration, The New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature; public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; the Howard Gilman Foundation; and by generous donations from audience members.

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www.gemsny.org

About the Artists

Acclaimed musicians Caroline Nicolas and Kevin Payne have appeared together around North America, Europe and Asia. Engagements include Sinfonieorchester Liechtenstein, Early Music Seattle, Victoria Baroque and Barock Nord West. They are both recipients of The English Concert in America's fellowship, and are graduates of The Juilliard School and the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.

About the Program

"Bassi in Dialogo" is a celebration of musical relationships. The period of isolation brought on by the COVID pandemic undoubtedly had us all viewing connection in a new light. Our programmatic response weaves together a melodious tale of composers and instruments, as well as their associated friendships and rivalries. These instruments share both real (gamba and lute) and often assumed (cello and gamba) musical ancestries. This concert is a harmonic narrative which explores the riches of our bass conversations.

Part 1: Rivals coming together (Hume and Frescobaldi)

"Bassi in Dialogo" opens with an invitation to collaborate: the gambist, reading off of music that is notated in lute tablature, performs some of the earliest solo music written for the instrument. In response, the lute joins our musical conversation in the Canzone.

Tobias Hume (c. 1579–1645, Scotland) was a composer, viol player and soldier. Much is unknown about his life. He considered himself first and foremost a professional soldier and secondly, an untrained musician. There are records of his serving abroad with the Russian and Swedish armies before an eventual return to England. He died destitute in an asylum.

His works, which speak for themselves, are amongst the first publications for the solo viola da gamba. Characteristic of his compositions are self-referential content (like today's Pavan) and the use of unusual playing techniques. This creative flair can perhaps be attributed to his lack of formal training. Hume's wish for the viol to champion itself in England over the popular lute resulted in a much documented musical rivalry with John Dowland.

Hume published his works in tablature notation, which was the standard notation for lute repertoire. The pavan is a slow duple-metered dance form, often of a grave and majestic nature. This version features florid instrumental passagework, a trait common to solo instrumental versions of this genre.

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643, Italy) brings us the rare portrait of a musician who enjoyed great professional success during his entire life. Unlike Tobias Hume, who likely began his musical studies in older age, Frescobaldi began his career as an acclaimed child prodigy. Frescobaldi was a virtuoso keyboard player whose compositions greatly influenced subsequent generations of musicians including Froberger, J.S. Bach and Purcell.

This Canzone is written for two bass instrument players: included are a solo part and an accompaniment. Though these parts are separate, the musical content between both are so similar that the effect is more of a shared discourse on the same ideas.

Part 2: Individuality, or, The Rise and Fall of the Viola da gamba in France (de Vise, Marais, Piccinini, Barrière)

The next chapter of our bass story brings us to France. We come to the music of two accomplished viol players, whose stories bring us to the apex and temporary end of the gamba's life. Marin Marais was one of the last great masters of the viol. Jean-Baptiste Barrière, born a generation too late to enjoy a successful career as a violist, eventually found a musical voice in the cello's newfound dominance in France.

Robert de Visée (c. 1655–1732/1733, France) was a lutenist, guitarist, theorbist, viol player, singer and

composer. An enigmatic figure, historians primarily sketch his life portrait from documents that mention his name. He may have studied with Francesco Corbetta, and was a chamber musician to Louis XIV. De Visée is mentioned in a letter of Jean Rousseau from 1688 which states that he was a “respected” musician at Versailles, working as a singer and instrumentalist. His compositional output includes two books of guitar music, a collection of theorbo and lute music (published with the option of being performed as ensemble pieces), as well as various pieces for theorbo and Baroque lute.

Marin Marais (1656–1728, France) was a composer and virtuoso viol player whose works are central to the gamba repertory. He studied composition with Jean-Baptiste Lully and viol with Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe. Marais’ compositional output includes five volumes of pieces for viols, operas and some now lost sacred works. His works include some of the earliest examples of program music, which is a type of instrumental work that is intended to convey a narrative.

Today’s movements come from Book III of Marais’ gamba publications. This volume includes a lengthy introduction detailing performance practice and specific ornamentation markings, and is thus of special importance to musicians today. In A minor, this suite opens with a slow and pleading Prelude that leads into a rhythmic Allemande, followed by a pointed Gigue.

Alessandro Piccinini (1566–1638, Italy) was a lutenist and composer. Born in Bologna, his father Leonardo Maria taught Alessandro and his brothers from a young age. He was employed at the Este court in Ferrara, and with the papal legates at Bologna and Ferrara. His most notable works are his two volumes of lute music: *Intavolatura di Liuto et di Chitarrone, libro primo* (1623) and *Intavolatura di Liuto* (posthumously published in 1639 by his son). Today’s Passacaglia comes from the latter collection. These books include some of the most important instructions on performance practice, as well as a claim from Piccinini himself as being the inventor of the archlute. Piccinini was known to have enjoyed a notable friendship with Frescobaldi.

Jean-Baptiste Barrière (1707–1747, France) was a viol player, cellist and composer. He trained on the gamba as a youth before switching to the cello. In 1731, he began working for the Académie Royale de Musique in Paris. He was awarded a special privilege by King Louis XV to compose and publish his instrumental works, as well as to study abroad. In 1736, Barrière used this opportunity to study in Italy with virtuoso cellist Francesco Alborea. He returned to Paris in 1738, where he performed for the Concert Spirituel to great acclaim. His compositions include four books of sonatas for violoncello and basso continuo.

This Largetto features some of Barrière’s most distinctive musical traits. These include his unique tonal sensitivity, use of lush harmonies, and understanding of the cello’s sonorous qualities. This movement, which is in rondo form, unfolds over a repeating descending bass line.

Part 3: The True Rivalry (Gabrielli, Vivaldi)

The third part of this program shows us the flair that the Italians brought to the violin family instruments. We also arrive at the real rivals in this program, which are the cello and the gamba. At the time that Marais was bringing the gamba repertoire to its pinnacle, the viol had already fallen out of favor in Italy for the louder violin family instruments. This trend eventually spread to the rest of Europe for several centuries, until a renewed interest in historical instruments would bring the gamba back to the concert hall.

Domenico Gabrielli (15 April 1651 or 19 October 1659 – 10 July 1690, Italy) was a composer and virtuoso cello player. He was born in Bologna, and worked for the church of San Petronio and for the court of Duke Francesco II d’Este of Modena. His compositions include some of the earliest published works for solo cello, as well as a few operas and vocal church works. This sonata comes from a collection from 1689, and is a reworking of a previously written sonata (which is also included in the same publication). It is worth noting that Bologna in the 1660s was the home to the innovation in string manufacturing that would allow for this type of piece to be written, which were wire-wound strings. This enabled cellos to be played with a quicker response. Indeed, one can easily view these sonatas as a celebration of the newfound sonorities Italy would bring to the world.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741, Italy) was a composer, violinist, teacher, impresario and priest. Born in Venice, he is recognized as one of the most prolific composers of the Baroque. His output includes over 500 instrumental concertos, 46 operas, 90 sonatas, and a large body of sacred choral music and sinfonias. Antonio began his musical studies on the violin with his father, a barber turned professional violinist. At the age of 24, he began his working career at the Ospedale della Pietà. The next year, he was ordained as a priest, and was soon nicknamed “il Prete Rosso” (The Red Priest), as a reference to his hair color.

Vivaldi’s cello sonatas were written between 1720 and 1730, likely due to the increased popularity of the instrument at that time. Benedetto Marcello had recently published a collection of six cello sonatas to great success. This may account for Vivaldi’s late foray into the genre. RV 44 is written in A minor, a key Vivaldi would come to frequent in his cello works.

Part 4: Les Voix Humaines

This harmonic story finishes with a great musical friendship in *Les Voix Humaines* (“Voices of Humanity”). A particularly warm and resonant key for the viol, this piece ends the program in the welcoming key of D Major. Though the gamba part is often performed on its own, the theorbo’s rich line serves to embody the joy that arises when musicians come together.

Program notes: Caroline Nicolas

NEXT WEEK: Washington Cornett and Sackbutt Ensemble
Festive Music from the German Kingdoms