

Première Recording of
Boismortier's Op 63 for Pardessus de viole duet
Launch date March 7th 2025, First Hand Records
by Jacqui Robertson-Wade

The discovery of the music – originally published in 1737 and in a private collection until 2021

In 2021, the French publisher Atelier Philidor, published an engraved score by Boismortier, that was previously in a private collection for centuries. Emma, from Philidor writes:

“The original Ms is for now in my possession. I’m the sole owner of the sole known copy of this opus and I purchased it from a French private collection.

“The Boismortier Œuvre 63 is bounded with 11 other books of instrumental music (original editions, 1720-1730). The whole book comprised 5 opus by Boismortier (Op. 63, 42, 25, 35, 38), 3 opus by Aubert (Op. 14, 15 & 16), 3 opus by Naudot, and one opus by Mouret. The facsimile is exclusively available at Atelier Philidor, nowhere else.”

Around the same time, Peter Wendland and I started to explore music for the 6 string Pardessus de viole and began meeting up to play, either online using Jamulus or in person. We gave marks out of ten to the varying movements of the six sonatas. Peter started on part 1 for the first movement of the first sonata and then we swapped parts for each subsequent movement. It was the discovery of a real musical treasure and a complete reversal of my preconceptions of Boismortier's music. Most viol players will know of Boismortier's op 10 for two bass violas da gamba; the op 63 is also written with interesting and expressive melodies that explore the whole range of these comparatively tiny instruments, particularly with double stopping which transforms two instruments into four with rich harmonies contributing to the sonority. As we got to know the music over a period of months, we increased our marks out of ten of the music and soon we realised we *had* to share this music and make a recording.

Do dreams come true?

Angel Early Music definitely made our recording dream come true! Along with funding from them, a lot of wonderful people who contributed to our Crowd Funding campaign and an anonymous donation, we were able to finally realise the dream of being able to record this music. In September 2023 we recorded the six sonatas along with two bonus tracks at St Martin's Church, in East Woodhay, Newbury, Berkshire, playing on average for 10 hours a day, for 3 days. We had the recording 'dream-team' of producer Matthew Bennet and engineer Dave Rowell. We decided to future proof the recording and recorded in Dolby Atmos which is a surround sound technology that creates a

three-dimensional audio experience by adding height channels to existing surround sound systems.

As it's quite rare to make a recording on pardessus de viole, we also had a videographer on the second day, which, although it was quite stressful, now gives us footage of our playing on YouTube and provides First Hand Records, the record label promoting our album, with some useful marketing materials.

We would like to thank Angel Early Music for getting us started on the recording process and for making the Boismortier Op 63 album possible. Dialogue Viols, with Ibrahim Aziz and Lynda Sayce, is recording again in April 2025. The new programme is called 'Before the Guillotine' and features music up until the French Revolution on quintons (these are hybrid viols/violins; 5 string, fretted instruments, in the shape of a violin, with a round back).

Video links on YouTube

1. The main promo (<https://youtu.be/EitzaBp6cKI>) = **21st Oct 24**
2. Sonata 3: 1st mvt (+ Instagram short) (<https://youtu.be/sX4842FTosk>) = **3 Nov 24**
3. FHR video featuring excs (<https://youtu.be/Uu625bv9E9M>) = **17 Nov 24**
4. Sonata 3: 2nd mvt (+ Instagram short) (<https://youtu.be/nOOrNoZF9xA>) = **1 Dec 24**
5. Sonata 3: 3rd mvt (<https://youtu.be/9yHwGbikYC0>) = **15 Dec 24**
6. Sonata 3: 4th mvt (first 60 seconds) (<https://youtu.be/R5prw-T2fUs>) = **5 Jan 2025**



Recording at St Martin's Church, East Woodhay, Newbury, RG20 OAL 11-13th Sept 2023

From Peter Wendland

Making this Pardessus recording was a very pleasant experience. The music was so inspiring, the recording team extremely professional, and the acoustic of the church supported the sound of our instruments perfectly.

The six sonatas are each written in a different key signature and use the complete range of the instrument. Each part contains the most beautiful lines as well as rich, warm chords. Through this one sometimes gets the impression that there are 3 or 4 instruments playing.

The idea of 'dialogue' between players and instruments is always very present in our performance, and our aim is to maintain a balanced conversation between the parts. We enjoyed adding our own ornamentations and responding to each other's ideas, in the playful French style. Furthering the dialogue intention, we went so far as to alternate who played top and bottom line in each movement and were very happy with the result. Simon Ives, for example, indicates this method of performing in his bass viol duets.

We recorded at a=392, which was the most common tuning in France in the 18th Century, and this set-up suits the Pardessus best – the warm character can be expressed beautifully, and a rich, blended sound results. The distinctive, much-loved voice of the viol is still in the body of the Pardessus, and the lower pressure on the belly of the instrument, created by the lower tuning, allows this to shine through.

For the CD cover we chose a detail from a painting by my late father, Gerhard Wendland, (1910-1986). As well as being a prolific painter and respected teacher, he was an accomplished amateur player of the viol, lute, harpsichord and recorder. It pleases me to include him in this way.

Extending the range: the *Pardessus de viole* CD booklet notes by Jacqui Robertson-Wade

As fashion and taste changed, a new viol, the *pardessus de viole*, was constructed and became especially popular not only among viol players who were fond of Italian music but also, importantly, among women; it was considered far more 'decent' for a lady to have a *pardessus de viole* resting between her knees than a violin on her arm. However, this is not to say that men did not play the *pardessus*; Marin Marais played and owned several *pardessus* and Jean-Pierre de Villeneuve was an amateur player who transcribed over 200 pieces from the 5 books by Marin Marais for the *pardessus*. The *Fantaisie En Echo* that has been recorded on this CD comes from this collection.

In Amsterdam in 1757, an amateur musician named Ancelet, (*Observations sur la musique, les musiciens, et les instruments*) wrote: "The bass viol is now confined to the apartments of the supporters of the old style of music, who, being entertained by it all their lives, seem to want to perpetuate their tastes and inspire their children and especially their daughters, for decency's sake to prefer the *pardessus* to other instruments, as if it would be less respectable to place the violin on the shoulder than the *pardessus* between their knees".

Research published in 2012 by Thomas Fitz-Hugh Mace situates the invention of the *pardessus de viole* at the height of the French viol tradition after the recent discovery of a *pardessus de viole* built by the great Parisian luthier Michel Collichon in 1686. In 1692 *Marin Marais* published *Pièces en trio as musique de chambre*. He suggested that such pieces would also sound well when played by two *dessus de viole* (treble viols). However, some high passages can be played effortlessly on an even smaller, ‘*par’-dessus* instrument, and perhaps this gives us another reason why the latter appeared around that time.

The six-string *pardessus* is tuned G C E A D G according to treatises by Michel Corette & C. R. Brijon, the third between the 4th and 5th strings. As a natural development, a smaller body soon began to be built to serve this new tuning. At some point before 1730 the six-string *pardessus* shed one string and became tuned G D A D G in 5ths and 4ths.

The limited projection of the *pardessus de viole* became more evident after the opening in 1725 of the first French series of public concerts, the *Concert Spirituel*, in the spacious hall of the *Palais des Tuileries*. Perhaps as a result of this innovation, the *pardessus* changed once again, adopting some characteristics of the violin. The first reference to this hybrid instrument appears in 1730 in the inventory of viol-maker Claude Pierray. Popularly known as a *quinton* the resulting instrument was referred to alternatively as a *pardessus à cinq cordes*, which explains why there is not a single piece of music assigned by name to the *quinton*; its entire repertoire exists under the sole heading of ‘*pardessus de viole à cinq cordes*’.

However, while over 250 publications from the 18th century mention the *pardessus de viole à cinq cordes* as a valid choice of instrument in performance, only a small amount of music was written specifically for it. It was commonly used as substitute for violin or flute. We do, however, sometimes see pieces written expressly for the *pardessus de viole*, for instance, Barthélemy de Caix’s 6 sonatas for two five-stringed *pardessus de viole*, violins or bass viols; these are perhaps the most challenging pieces in the instrument’s repertoire and not unlike Leclair’s sonatas for two unaccompanied violins. Conversely, other works by such composers as Charles Dollé and Pierre Hugard reverse the relationship, naming the violin as a substitute for the *pardessus de viole*. The composer, N.G. Lendormy even wrote pieces for the *pardessus de viole* and violin to play side by side, although these are sadly lost.

To conclude, the 5-string *pardessus* did not supersede the 6-string model, which continued to be built as late as 1760. In mid-18th century France, we find three small types of viols, each fulfilling the same musical role: a 5-string instrument shaped like a viol with a flat back, (the *pardessus de viole à cinq cordes*); a 5-string instrument shaped like a violin, with a curved back, (the *quinton*), and a 6-string instrument, shaped like a viol, with a flat back, (the *pardessus de viole*).

In this context, the recent discovery of Boismortier’s Op 63 for two 6-string *pardessus de viole* is an exciting and important find.