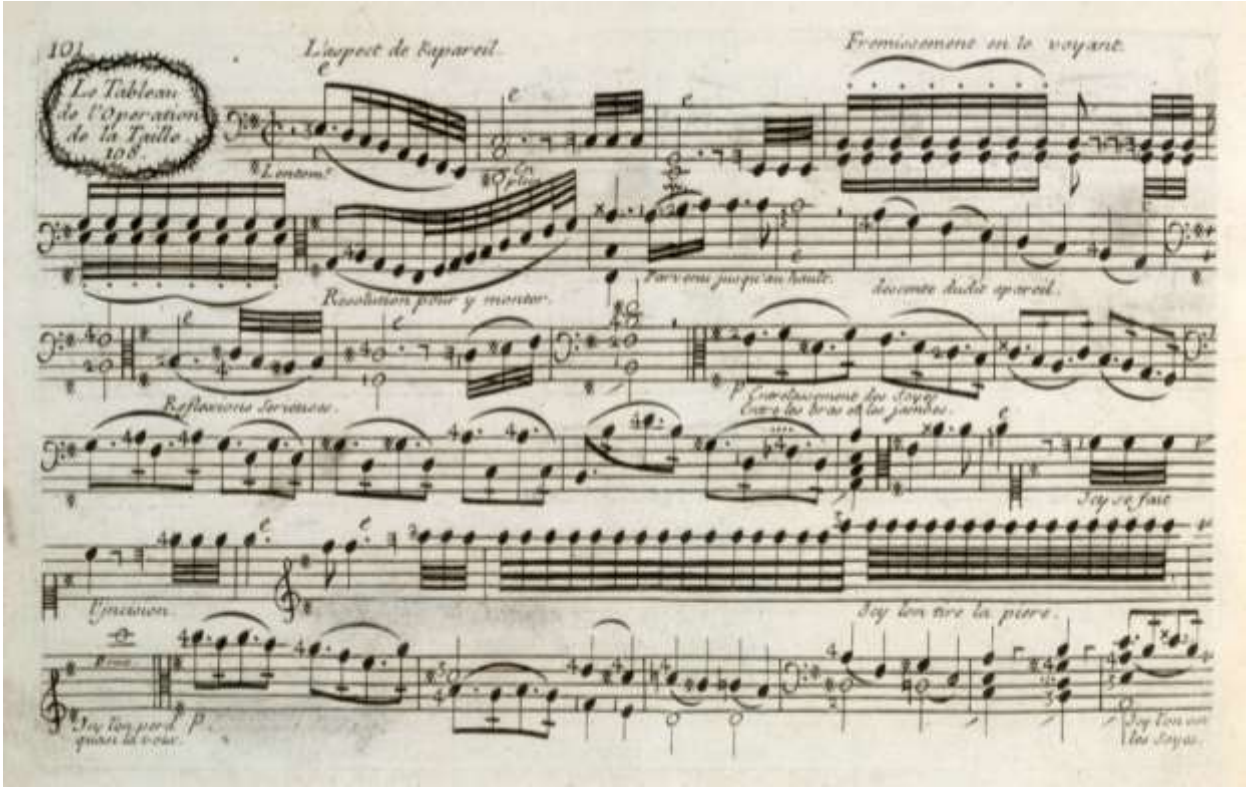
Le tableau de l'opération de la taille, by Marin Marais

Rare Music Collection, University of Melbourne



Marin Marais (French, 1656–1728)
Le tableau de l'opération de la taille (viol part), p. 101
from *Pièces de viole* [5th book]
Paris: The author, Boivin, Roland Marais, Jean Louis Marais, 1725
Rare Music Collection
University of Melbourne Library

This extraordinary piece of music, titled 'A description of the operation of the stone', is a step-by-step account of an early 18th-century operation to remove a urinary bladder calculus. Thus it is a strange but illuminating intersection of music and medicine. Composed by viola da gamba virtuoso Marin Marais, a member of Louis XIV's court orchestra, it is found in the last of five volumes of music he wrote for viols and harpsichord.

The details of the surgery (undertaken without anaesthetic) and the physical and emotional experience of the patient are conveyed both in words – there are 14 pithy annotations – and in the music. The patient 'trembles at the sight' of the 'apparatus' (operating table); his arms and legs are secured with 'silk restraints', and forceps are 'introduced'. Marais, unsurprisingly, could draw upon first-hand experience; he underwent surgery in 1720 (aged 64) and lived to the age of 72.

Teaching ideas

The University of Melbourne's curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, contact a collection manager.

Music in France, c. 1600–1789
Situate *Le tableau de l'opération de la taille* in its political, cultural and religious frameworks, to highlight issues and debates in notation, performance practice and music theory in France in this period.

Music and Health Research
Visit the Rare Music Collection and find examples of music to promote healthy behaviours for individuals and groups, from the perspectives of the humanities and sociology. Critically analyse these examples for research and theories pertinent to music and health.

Music Psychology Research
Explore the Rare Music Collection to find scores that reflect the relationship between music and the brain, as well as music and the body.

Guided Imagery and Music Practice
Using *Le tableau de l'opération de la taille* as a case study in guided imagery and music practice, investigate states of consciousness in surgery.

Historical Performance Practice
In the Rare Music Collection, find and critically evaluate examples of unconventional performance practice from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Music History 1: Monteverdi to Mozart
Interpret the work of Marin Marais in its cultural context in the 18th century. Use music-specific bibliographic tools from the Rare Music Collection in your analysis.

Body, Mind and Medicine: A Dissection
Study the role of music in the hospital, the asylum, the courtroom and the operating theatre. Cite examples from the Rare Music Collection in which disease is expressed in music.

Rethinking the Body
How has the body been understood in the music tradition? Find examples in the Rare Music Collection where the human body is constructed through music performance.

Intersecting objects

Marin Marais (French, 1656–1728)
Basse continues du quatrième livre des pièces à I. et III. violes ('Allemande l'Asmatique', no. 70)
Paris: The author, Hurel, Foucault, 1717
Rare Music Collection
University of Melbourne Library

Thomas Fairland (English, 1804–1852)
after William Home Clift (English, 1803–1833)
Plate 7 (lithograph)
from Edward Stanley (English, 1791–1862)
An account of the mode of performing the lateral operation of lithotomy
London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829
Rare Books Collection
University of Melbourne Library

To learn more, visit the websites of the Rare Music Collection and the Rare Books Collection.

Further reading

James D. Franklin, 'Surgery, note by note: Marin Marais' *Tableau de l'opération de la taille*', *Hektoen International: A Journal of Medical Humanities*, Summer 2012.