

Nicolas Vallet □ – Le Secret Des Muses (2003)

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Paul O'Dette - Lute

This fine program of works by 17th-century French lutenist/composer/teacher Nicolas Vallet will appeal primarily to lute players and devotees of plucked-string music of the northern European late-Renaissance/early Baroque. Vallet left France for Holland early in his career and spent the rest of his life there as a free-lance musician, member of a lute quartet, and instructor at his own dance school. But most importantly for today's players and listeners, he also composed and arranged volumes of lute music, including the two-part collection known as *Le Secret des Muses* (1615 & 1616) and sets of Psalms, and he was careful to include detail regarding performing technique and fingering.

As experts will note, Vallet was a master at using the 10-course lute's full range, notably employing the bass-register strings to a far greater degree than was common at the time. His contrapuntal skills are especially impressive (an influence attributable to his admiration for his contemporary, Sweelinck), heard more simply in pieces such as the *Praeludium* (track 17) or *Courante* (track 18), and more elaborately in Vallet's setting of a Luther hymn, *Onse Vader in Hemelryck*. Vallet's quartet included three expatriate Englishmen, and many of his arrangements are of Elizabethan songs and lute pieces, here represented by *All in a Garden*

Green and Earl of Essex Galliard, among others.

Paul O'Dette unquestionably is one of today's great lute masters, so it's more than fitting that he should be bringing to our attention the work of one who was similarly regarded. The technique bears all the marks that listeners familiar with O'Dette's many past recordings will recognize: exceptionally clean, clear articulation, careful attention to internal lines, tasteful ornamentation, and consummate musicianship that bestows just that extra ounce of listenability even to lesser-known or more routine works. Although the music and performances here won't blow you away with flashy virtuosity or fiery fingerwork--it's all fairly low-key--there's a lot to listen to, as Vallet tends to keep things moving and seems to fill every space in the score with notes. The recording perfectly captures O'Dette's instrument--a 10-course lute made in 1984 by Ray Nurse after Hans Frei--allowing us to appreciate its full body and warm brilliance without any annoying, close-miking sonic artifacts. ---David Vernier, ClassicsToday.com

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