

*Les plaisirs les plus charmants. Gordon Ferries (baroque guitar).  
Delphian, DCD 34011*

*From being something of a poor relation amongst plucked stringed instruments, spurned by lutenists and classical guitarists alike, the baroque guitar has recently come into its own with several talented players beginning to take an interest in the instrument and its extensive repertoire. Gordon Ferries' programme of late-17<sup>th</sup> century music by composers associated with the court of Louis XIV is a well judged mixture of familiar names-Corbetta, de Visée-and their less well known but by no means inferior contemporaries, Henri Grénerin, Rémy Médard and Antoine Carré. Each is represented by a substantial group of dance movements. As one would expect the suites by Corbetta, in A minor from *La guitarra royale* (1671) and de Visée, in C major from the book of 1682 (not 1686 as stated in the notes, although the final minuet is from the 1686 book) are musically the most substantial and rewarding. Grénerin however runs them a close second. His D major suite is charming, and Ferries makes the most of it with delicate notes inégales in the passcaille and imaginative use of golpeado to highlight the dance rhythm of the minuet. Carré was deeply indebted to Corbetta to the extent of plagiarizing some of his ideas and shares many of Corbetta's intensely introspective qualities, especially when writing in a minor key. Médard is perhaps the least talented of the four, covering his deficiencies with his claim in the preface that although he has imitated Corbetta he has endowed his pieces with a simplicity which Corbetta did not take the pains to seek. His chromatic prelude is interesting but the other movements rather more pedestrian. Unlike much of the baroque guitar repertoire, however, none of the pieces are trivial. All repay repeated and attentive listening and justify the care which Ferries has taken in presenting them. Also included are two contrasting chaconnes by Corbetta, the first from his 1648 book and the second from *La guitarra royale*. The latter in particular is a virtuoso showpiece incorporating the famous 'repicco' variation and it gives Ferries an opportunity to show off his formidable technique. There is also a selection of arrangements for guitar of movements from the theatre works of Marais, Campra and Lully and of a keyboard piece by Couperin from the huge manuscript of guitar music, Bibliothèque Nationale de France Rés. F. 844. Arrangements of this kind were enormously popular and those played here work surprisingly well in a reduced medium.*

*Ferries uses two different instruments, a modern instrument after Jean Voboam (Paris, 1690) by D. Sutherland for most of the music, and a French instrument from c.1760 in Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments for all but one of the pieces from Ms. Mus. Rés. F 884. Although there is surprisingly little to choose between the two, the older instrument does sound more mellow and resonant; the modern instrument is focussed and has a slightly metallic quality especially in strummed chords.*

*This is the most satisfying recording of baroque guitar music to have come my way in the last year or so, one which demands to be sat down and listened to, rather than used as musical wallpaper. It is to be hoped that Ferries soon has further opportunities to present us with more of this repertoire.*

*Monica Hall*