

*The following review by Michael O’Loughlin appeared in the Journal of the Viola da Gamba Society of America, volume XL, 2003, p. 67f*

Königliche Gambenduos [Royal Gamba Duets]: 23 sonatas by French and Italian composers of the eighteenth century in contemporary transcriptions. Edited by Leonore and Günter von Zadow. Heidelberg, Germany: Edition Güntersberg, 2002. 5 Volumes. Vol. 1, €21; Vol. 2, €16; Vol.3, €16; Vol. 4, €18; Vol. 5, €16.

In a delightful treatise which has been published in this Journal, Hubert le Blanc in 1740 divided the known musical world into *pièces*, the province of the French, and sonatas, that of the Italians.<sup>1</sup> Lamenting the decline of the viol, Le Blanc attributes this in large part to the reluctance of its masters – including Marais senior – to broaden their art and embrace the technical and musical demands of the Italian sonata. Were Le Blanc miraculously to reappear, he might still castigate us for the same reason. Our defence would be that until recently, we were relatively unaware of the sonata repertoire. Modern viol players have been very well served for *pièces*: most if not all of the published suites from the “golden age” in France are available in facsimile or other modern editions. However, fewer high baroque sonatas for the viol have been available, and they represent very few composers: for example, Telemann, J. S. Bach, Abel, Finger, and for the more adventurous, C. P. E. Bach.

This collection should therefore be hailed as a important publishing event for viol players. There are five volumes containing 23 sonatas in all, of which 22 have not been published since the eighteenth century in the version presented here. Eleven of the works are true solo sonatas, mainly in the Italian style, by various composers, and 12 are previously unknown suites for two bass viols in the French style by Boismortier. I am using the word “solo” in the eighteenth-century sense: a sonata for solo instrument with accompaniment. The collection represents a cross-section of composers who were popular in France in the middle decades of the eighteenth century: Somis, Corelli, Mascitti, Montanari, Senaillé, Leclair and Boismortier, along with one who was more famous in Germany, namely Franz Benda.

Readers who are unaware of any gamba sonatas by most of the above composers need not feel that their education has been neglected: the solo sonatas are transcriptions from originals for violin. As Hazelle Miloradovitch has pointed out, the habit of transcribing violin sonatas for the viol was quite widespread in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The five volumes here under review represent a modern edition of a single eighteenth-century manuscript volume entitled “Recueil des Plus belles Sonates a basse de Viole avec accompagnement ou a deux basses sans Violon par les mellieurs auteurs François et Italien.” The original order of works in the manuscript has been preserved, resulting in the following distribution: Vol. 1, Somis and Senaillé; Vols. 2 and 3, Boismortier; Vol. 4, Corelli, Mascitti and Leclair; Vol. 5, Montanari, Senaillé and Benda. The manuscript gives us an interesting insight into the performance practice of a particular time and place.

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<sup>1</sup> Hubert Le Blanc, Defense of the Viola da Gamba Against the Enterprises of the Violin and the Pretensions of the Violoncello, Trans. Barbara Garvey Jackson, *JVdGSA* 10 (1973) 11-28, 69-80; 11 (1974) 17-58.

<sup>2</sup> Hazelle Miloradovitch, “Eighteenth-century Manuscript Transcriptions for Viols of Music by Corelli and Marais in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris: Sonatas and Pièces de Viole,” Chelys 12 (1983) 53.

The place is Berlin, specifically the court of Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, who became King of Prussia in 1786, on the death of his uncle, Frederick the Great. The manuscript is found in the Königlische Hausbibliothek, or Royal Library of the Berlin Palace, one of the many collections which now make up the music collection of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Berlin National Library). As its name implies, the Royal Library contains music which was collected for the private use of the members of the royal household. The Prussian royal family contained several good musicians, but its only known gambist (and cellist) in the eighteenth century was Friedrich Wilhelm.<sup>3</sup> The time is unfortunately more difficult to specify, but the manuscript was probably prepared during or close to the 1760s, the period when the prince was most actively involved in gamba playing.<sup>4</sup>

The manuscript was probably used by the prince and his teacher, the great virtuoso Ludwig Christian Hesse, along with the large numbers of Opéra Comique arrangements prepared by Hesse for the same combination. It is fascinating and stimulating to the imagination to find a collection with such specific associations, and herein lie its strength and its weakness. Hesse and Friedrich Wilhelm probably played the works without further accompaniment, and the copyist (who was not Hesse) did not provide figures for the bass. This presents no problems in the case of the Boismortier duets, which like his many similar collections were unlikely to have been conceived or played with continuo. However, the solo sonatas by the other composers were copied from originals which had a solo violin line plus figured bass continuo. The original performers of the gamba versions may have enjoyed playing them without harpsichord, but it is a shame that our performance possibility is similarly limited. Admittedly, the title of the collection, quoted above, envisages performance with or without (chordal) accompaniment. Then as now, there would have been keyboard players who could do a good job accompanying using a score with an unfigured bass line. However, it does make it more difficult. Even if they chose not to provide a keyboard realisation, the editors could perhaps have provided figures from the original publications of those violin sonatas which are available. It must be said that all of the pieces do work and are pleasant on the combination envisaged by the edition, namely two viols. One viol and one cello are also appropriate.

In other respects the publication is excellent. For the volumes which contain the 11 solo sonatas (1, 4 and 5), the editors have provided two scores which are identical except for the choice of clef in the solo part. One score presents the music as it appears in the original, that is with the solo part in treble clef, to be read one octave lower. This is the way most gamba music of the Berlin School appears in the original manuscripts. Players unused to treble clef can use the other score, in which the alto clef and occasionally the bass clef are used for the solo part. In the case of the 12 duets by Boismortier, both parts in both scores are notated in bass clef, as in the original. The music printing is large and clear, making it as easy to read as one could hope for. The editors claim that only one of the 23 works has been published in a modern edition, namely the sonata by Benda. Obviously, many editions of the Corelli

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<sup>3</sup> Claims that Princess Anna Amalia (the younger sister of Frederick the Great) played the viol have not been substantiated.

<sup>4</sup> See Michael O’Loughlin, “Ludwig Christian Hesse and the Berlin Virtuoso Style,” *JVdGSA* 35 (1998), 44-49.

sonata (Op 5 no. 9) are available, including a facsimile of another contemporary viol transcription, in the same key.<sup>5</sup>

The editors have published in Volume 1 an excellent and complete preface to the whole series, in German and English. Fortunately, buyers of the other volumes can download it from the publisher's website: <http://www.guentersberg.de>. Since the preface is easily accessible, I will summarize it only briefly here. It deals with the manuscript source and lists the composers and their pieces, giving the original printed sources of the violin sonatas, where they could be found. In the case of the Boismortier duets, no other source was found, which will make Volumes 2 and 3 of the series attractive and important for players who enjoy this composer's many other works in this genre. The preface continues with an interesting comparison between the gamba transcriptions and the violin originals, which provides a summary of the types of alterations which the anonymous arranger made, illustrated by good musical examples. Footnotes provide documentation, although in one case the name of author of a relevant article has been omitted.<sup>6</sup> There is a general statement of the editorial method, but no critical commentary. The few mistakes in the manuscript corrected by the editors are clearly marked in notes at the foot of the relevant page in the music, but players will need basic German for this.

One of the typical alterations made by the copyist of the Berlin manuscript was the omission or simplification of ornamentation. The editors rightly point out that this would speak for its use in teaching. However, we gather from authors such as Johann Reichardt, C. P. E. Bach, F. W. Marpurg and Charles Burney that in the Berlin performance style, expressive playing intended to move the hearts of the listeners took precedence over virtuoso display. To this end, ornamentation was tasteful but sparing. As well as making the pieces more suitable for didactic purposes, the alterations could be an adaptation to the Berlin taste. For example, the alteration in the third bar of the first example in the preface, a sonata by Senaillé, serves not only to simplify the line, but to make it more expressive.

Most of the composers show their allegiance to Corelli, and we are reminded of the enormous influence of that composer in the eighteenth century. Jean Baptiste Senaillé (c1688-1730) is the most well-represented, with four sonatas from his Opus 3, 4 and 5. In 1743 Titon du Tillet said of him: "He made an agreeable blend of the natural, noble and gracious melody of French music with the learned and brilliant harmony of Italian music, which [combination] pleased persons of good taste."<sup>7</sup> Such persons will probably still be pleased by the strong Corellian bass lines matched to the undeniably French melodic patterns. The slow movements are perhaps better than the fast ones, some of which are melodically uninspired. The first of the sonatas by Senaillé is another interesting example of "Berlinisation" by the arranger: it is a pasticcio of movements from two sonatas from the composer's Opus 3 and 5,

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<sup>5</sup> Arcangelo Corelli, *Sonatas for Viol and Continuo*, with introduction by Hazelle Miloradovitch (Peer [Belgium]: Musica-Alamire, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Johannes Boer, "The Viola da Gamba Sonatas by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach in the Context of Late German Viol Masters and the 'Galant' Style," Johannes Boer and Guido van Oorschot, eds., *A Viola da Gamba Miscellany*, Proceedings of the International Viola da Gamba Symposium, Utrecht 1991 (Utrecht: STIMU, 1994) 115-131.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Peter Walls, "Senaillé [Senallié, Senaillié, Senallier, Senaillier], Jean Baptiste," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (accessed 10 June 2003), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

arranged to form a single sonata in the typical “Berlin sonata schema:” three movements in the same key, slow-fast-fast. However, for sonata 23 in Volume 5, the arranger put together a five-movement pasticcio from five different sonatas!

Volume 1 contains two sonatas by Giovanni Battista Somis (1686-1763), an Italian who assisted his country’s dominance of the French scene by teaching Leclair and other French violinists. Somis may have been the inventor of the “Berlin sonata schema,” which I have so named simply because it was more widely used by more composers in Berlin than in any other school. Both of these sonatas are in this form, and neither could be found by the editors among the composer’s known works. These are attractive pieces, demanding a level of technique perhaps equivalent to that of the Telemann sonatas for viol and basso continuo. In some of the fast movements, the bass line is busier than the upper voice.

The three composers in Volume 4 are each represented by one sonata. The Corelli piece is of course excellent, and fun for both players. The *adagio*, with its descending chromatic fourth in the bass, is a miniature classic, although it contains none of the florid ornamentation found in other eighteenth-century editions of the Opus 5 sonatas. The final *Tempo di Gavotta* provides a workout for both players: string crossings in the top voice, and relentless eighth notes at a brisk tempo in the bass. Michele Mascitti (1663/4-1760) was an Italian expatriate who much admired by Hubert le Blanc and Paris generally. As one would expect, his sonata is quite Corellian. Its rather odd collection of five movements suggests that it may also have been put together by the arranger, but since neither the editors nor I were able to locate the original, one cannot be sure. The final movement is strikingly reminiscent of the Corelli gavotte mentioned above. In any case, this is a very attractive piece. Volume 4 concludes with a sonata by Jean-Marie Leclair (1697-1764). Leclair was one of the best-known advocates of the mixed taste, as this sonata demonstrates. Another *pasticcio* from Opus 1 and 2, it is fortunately less virtuosic than some of the composer’s other violin works. These three sonatas make Volume 4 to my taste the best of the five volumes.

The last two composers are found in Volume 5, again with one sonata each, along with two by Senaillé. The sonata by Francesco (Antonio) Montanari (1676-1737) is not unpleasant, but shortwinded and perhaps overly sequential. The one by Franz Benda (1709-1786) is probably the latest of the sonatas, and although it is not as intense as similar works by other Berliners such as C. P. E. Bach, it has some typical characteristics of the Berlin style: singing melodies, appoggiaturas, and large expressive intervals such as sixths, sevenths and tenths. This is the only work which has been published in a version sourced from the same manuscript.<sup>8</sup> The earlier edition by Hannelore Müller has the advantage of a realisation of the unfigured bass; however, this new edition is more stylistic and in touch with modern practice in its more cautious approach to editorial additions, and it does not clutter the music with bowings and fingerings.

Just over half of the 23 pieces are duet “sonatas” by Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689-1755), who is named in the manuscript “Beaumortier” or “Beaumortié.” These are found in Volumes 2 and 3. These pieces imitate the formal structure of the *sonata da chiesa*: four movements, slow-fast-slow-fast. However, the individual movements are quite French. The melodies are pleasant and flowing in the French manner, and there is never any Italianate arpeggiated passagework. Most of

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<sup>8</sup> Franz Benda, *Sonata in F Major*, ed. Hannelore Müller (Wilhelmshaven, Germany: Heinrichshofen, 1971).

the fast movements are standard French dance forms: mostly *allemandes* and *courantes* for the second movements, and *gigues*, *gavottes* or pairs of *menuets* for the final movements. The *allemande* can double as a fast movement (in one case marked *gayment*) or a slow movement (*gravement*). The other slow movements are either *sarabandes*, or designated by such terms as *doucement* and *lentement*. Most of the movements are quite short, and a typical sonata would be over in five minutes with repeats.

These pieces can be played without leaving first position on the bass viol, and are technically quite easy. Intermediate players might benefit from the practice in trills and dotted rhythms which some movements provide, as well as the chance to work on perfecting the elegant French style in pieces which are less demanding than (for example) the duets in Marais Book 1. Players will also enjoy the fact that although the first voice remains for the most part above the second, both parts have equal interest and share the same thematic material. Since there is no idiomatic writing for viol, the pieces could as well be played by any other bass instruments.

These five volumes form a very useful addition to the viol player's library. They will widen some players' horizons by providing them with music in a genre which is not especially rich in repertoire. Players can easily exchange the rôles of Master and Pupil (or Master and Servant!), as both parts contain material which is equally interesting, though not always similar. The pieces are generally attractive, and were well selected by the anonymous arranger for their suitability for performance by two viols unaccompanied.

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