

## THE VIOL Autumn 2009 No 16

**Johann Pfeiffer (1697-1761), *Concerto for Viola da Gamba, 2 Violins and Basso Continuo (Cembalo e Violoncello) in A Major*. Edition Güntersberg, 2008. (G144) Euro 21.80 from the Publisher.  
À Tempo Giusto – Allegro – Largo – Allegro**

Pfeiffer was born in Nuremberg, 2 years after Pachelbel returned to Nuremberg as a very well-known Frankonian. Pfeiffer studied violin and law (like Telemann) and became Kapellmeister at the Weimar Court at the age of 29. Later he went to Bayreuth and was a highly regarded composer, as well as the composition teacher of the future Margravine Wilhelmine. He was honoured with the title of Hofrat in 1753.

He composed sonatas for one instrument (viola d'amore, Viol, oboe d'amore, violino piccolo and lute), some accompanied by harpsichord obbligato, as well as symphonies, overtures and concertos.

The first time I came across Pfeiffer as a composer was as a teenager when I listened to an old East-German recording of Siegfried Pank playing the Telemann concerto for viol and orchestra in D Major, as well as a viol concerto by Pfeiffer (I believe). I am not sure whether this concerto was the same as the one in this new edition, but I remember being impressed by the texture of the music, despite the low recording and playing quality.

This Concerto is a welcome addition to a much-neglected repertoire for the viol. Concertos with a similar instrumentation exist in modern edition by Telemann. Having the Pfeiffer concerto (as well as his Sonata in D, also Güntersberg) available now would make a good recording of the two highly regarded composers. How about a theme (sadly necessary these days) of composers who studied law and went on to being musicians?

Sadly the original manuscript was destroyed in WWII and this edition had to rely on 19th century sources. Judging from the 2 pages provided with the preface of these sources, they look clean and useable, and even contain the fingering and the (presumably original) figured bass.

The modern edition is excellent. It provides a clean score with figured bass, a Continuo part with figured bass as well as written out accompaniment (with the solo parts in small print), and clean and legible solo parts (bass part figured).

It is a delightful piece, which looks as idiomatic as it can be, considering that Pfeiffer was not a viol player. The fast movements are fairly challenging in places, but no more so than a Telemann Gamba Sonata. The key of A Major creates an interesting and unusual sonority and puts the viol part in an open-sounding and good part of the instrument.

*Susanne Heinrich*