

THE VIOL No 18, Spring 2010:

Georg Friedrich Händel *Sonate in g moll für Viola da Gamba oder Viola und Basso Continuo* Edition Güntersberg G149

In recent years we have become used to Güntersberg's fine editions of music for bass viol, which have considerably widened our knowledge of the repertoire and in particular (finally!) of the Berlin school of CPE Bach, Schaffrath, Benda, and Graun. Readers may not be aware of Michael O'Lochlin's fine new authoritative book about these composers (ISBN 978 - 0 - 7546 - 5885- 6) which offers all the necessary companion information.

At last we have a really useable edition of Handel's only sonata for bass viol and continuo.

For years bass viol players wishing to play a solo by him have had to content themselves with a spurious sonata with obbligato harpsichord later attributed to the Nuremberg composer Johann Martin Leffloth. Graham Pont (Early Music Performer March 2009) has made a case for its reattribution to Handel. I have performed the piece some thirty times and it still doesn't feel like Handel. But it sits perfectly in the viola player's first position so it could well be an early attempt (but later than early Handel?) to put the viola on the map.

Gambists would have no Handel sonata at all to play if the composer himself had not written out the first bar of a violin sonata in the alto clef with the remark "per la viola da gamba". This is the basis for the reconstruction published as G149 by the von Zadows. It is everything the gambist could possibly want. The score is beautifully and clearly laid out without page-turns during movements and the player is treated like an adult with no annoying slurs or articulations in brackets. It seems that the mania for homogenising slurs has passed.

The edition comes with 1) a solo gamba part, 2) a score with figures for the keyboard player to realise his own bass line 3) a realised version 4) a figured bass part for a second string bass and 5) a part for the viola with the necessary transpositions of the three bars in the final allegro which go below its range.

Peter Holman's informative introduction sets the scene with some interesting speculation about possible players and other relevant background. The only issue not covered is whether the transcriber should be allowed the freedom to modify the two really awkward passages in the second movement for performance on the gamba. This player has seen fit to invert two pairs of 16th notes for his own performances and now goes on stage without anxiety! And I'll be happy to justify this to Mr Handel when I meet him in baroque heaven.....

Charles Medlam