

VdGSA News

September 2010

Johann Gottlieb Graun, *Sonata in B minor for viola da gamba and harpsichord* (Graun WV Av:XV:50, Wendt 27), ed. Michael O'Loughlin. Edition Güntersberg, first edition, 2010, G150. ISMN M-50174-150-2. Score and two parts (solo in treble clef and alto clef), €15.80.



Viola da gambists who are interested in expanding their concert repertoire will be very pleased with Michael O'Loughlin's recent offering, the first published edition of Johann Gottlieb Graun's Sonata in B minor for viola da gamba and harpsichord. This three-movement sonata, originally written by Graun as a trio, survives in three

manuscripts whose instrumentation is two violins (or violin and flauto traverso) with basso continuo. However, the sonata also survives in a fourth manuscript arranged for keyboard and gamba, as a *cembalo obbligato* sonata. All four manuscripts are in the hand of Frederick the Great's resident virtuoso gambist, Ludwig Christian Hesse (1716–72). It is the manuscript of Hesse's *cembalo obbligato* arrangement that provides the primary source for O'Loughlin's fine edition of the sonata.

O'Loughlin's edition of Hesse's arrangement of the Graun trio sonata brings a lovely new work to life for gamba soloists. O'Loughlin has edited or written the introductions to thirteen of the fifteen Graun editions that have appeared from the well-known early music publishers Edition Güntersberg (Heidelberg), since 2002. In addition to being a musicologist at Queensland University, O'Loughlin is a gamba player himself (and cellist with the Queensland Orchestra, Brisbane), and he is one of our great authorities on eighteenth-century North German music. His expertise as a performer and a musicologist certainly informs this new edition.

Güntersberg's handsome catalogue is fundamental for early music chamber players, and for gambists in particular. The editions are wonderful to play from and feature intelligent page layout and visually neat parts. Most especially, they offer succinct, trustworthy introductory remarks and critical apparatus. O'Loughlin's edition of Graun's Sonata in B minor is no exception, opening with an introduction in German and English about the composer and a brief discussion of the manuscript sources from which the edition was created. Included are two solo gamba parts, one written in treble clef (which Hesse derived from the second violin part of Graun's trio sonata), one in alto clef, and a well-planned keyboard score. O'Loughlin's cembalo part takes its phrasing and dynamic markings from Hesse's *cembalo obbligato* manuscript. There Hesse fashioned the harpsichord's top line from Graun's first violinist's part and the same bass line from the continuo part, with figures applied only where the violin is silent. I played through this work with harpsichord as the keyboard choice. However, dynamics, phrasing, and the lie of the fingers on the keyboard suggest that a reading with fortepiano would be satisfying to explore. (O'Loughlin's introduction assumes a harpsichord performance of the part.) The pitch register of the gamba part often lies below that of the keyboard's right hand, rendering an attractively mellow ensemble sound, one that would work well with fortepiano.

Graun's Sonata in B minor is a very attractive piece intended for public performance by professional players and befitting Frederick the Great's brilliant court soloists, of whom Graun himself was one (c. 1732–1771). The middle of three musician brothers, two of whom achieved major North German reputations as composer-performers, Johann Gottlieb Graun (1702/3–1771) had been taught violin by Pisendel and Tartini. Graun, in turn, was secured by J.S. Bach as violin teacher to his son, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1726–1727). A *Konzertmeister* (paid four times more than Frederick's orchestral players) and a composer of orchestral and chamber music throughout his career at the court, J.G. Graun is now considered to be the premiere composer of the Berlin School of the viola da gamba. He wrote twenty-two major works for the gamba, including **eight** concertos with strings, sonatas of varying

types with gamba featured in significant roles, and two cantatas with *obbligato* gamba parts. A virtuoso violinist, Graun trained orchestral musicians for one of the greatest ensembles in Europe (according to Burney) and had personal connections with the important gambists of his day—Hesse and Christian Ferdinand Abel (c. 1683–1737)—for whom Bach may have written his three gamba sonatas. Thus it is no surprise that Graun wrote gamba music that is technically challenging, some of it as virtuoso as that of Forqueray (e.g., Graun's Concerto in A, third movement).

The Sonata in B minor is not one of Graun's most difficult pieces for gamba, but there are some technical difficulties presented, these being intensified by Hesse's addition of chords and double stops to the gamba part. Graun's music is solidly composed and emotionally satisfying. This is particularly true of the slow movements that feature the expressive gestures, ornaments, and harmonic language of the *empfindsamer Stil*, of which the first movement—marked *Adagio e Mesto*—is a fine example. The three movements of the sonata, arranged in slow-fast-fast tempo order, are attractive to perform, showcasing some delightful duet passages with the keyboardist's right hand that betray the work's trio origins. The second and third movements are cast in symmetrical binary forms comprising both Baroque and new Classic-era structural and stylistic features. I highly recommend O'Loughlin's Güntersberg edition of Graun's Sonata in B minor, music that is engaging for both performer and audience alike.

Melanie Bookout, Fort Wayne, IN