

The Viol No 20, Autumn 2010

Johann Gottlieb Graun (1702/3-1771), Sonata in B Minor for Viola da Gamba and obbligato keyboard. G150, GraunWV Av:XV:50 (Wend 27), ISMN 50174-150-2, Euro 15.80

Another great publication for viol from Guentersberg Editions. JG Graun was concert master for Frederick the Great, and worked at the same court with Ludwig Christian Hesse, the gamba virtuoso. A contemporary, J.A. Hiller wrote in 1766 about Hesse: 'the skill, the nicety and the fire, all of which can be found aplenty in his performance, make him the greatest viol player in Europe at this time'. The original of this piece was written for 2 violins and Continuo, and the transcription, which is published in this edition, was done by Hesse himself. This was nothing unusual, as we know from the first Bach Gamba Sonata which was originally written for 2 flutes and Continuo. As the dynamic markings are presumably the same in the keyboard part as originally in violin 2 and BC, it cannot be said for certain that the obbligato keyboard part is intended to be played on a fortepiano, which is something one must assume without the background knowledge of the transcription.

My first reaction was 'oh, B Minor..', but the piece is actually very playable and the fairly unusual key gives the viol a lovely glow. All three movements are extremely enjoyable, but especially the first Adagio e Mesto is one of the most beautiful pieces I have come across for this combination of instruments. I can't do much more than recommend this volume to everybody: it is a very unusual piece with many lovely surprises. I hope there is more Graun out there, waiting to be published.

Susanne Heinrich