

The Viol No 23 Summer 2011

August Kühnel *Sonate ô Partite ad una ô due Viole da Gamba con il Basso Continuo*

Sonatas I – III: Edition Güntersberg G161

Sonatinas IV – VI: Edition Güntersberg G162

edited by Günter and Leonore von Zadow, with continuo realisation by Dankwart von Zadow.

These two editions form the first part of what will be a complete modern urtext edition of Kühnel's publication of 1698, which contains 14 works for one and two bass viols. Both editions have an editorial forward in German and English, as well as a translation of the original Preface, together with facsimiles of title page, Kühnel's preface and a few short extracts of music. (A misprint in the editors' Forward gives the original publication date as 1689.) For your money, you get a score showing viol parts and a figured bass, plus a separate set of playing parts for the two viols and the figured bass continuo. As an optional extra there is a continuo realisation score, to be ordered separately. A complete facsimile edition was published by Fuzeau in 1998. The original 17th century engraving is not of the best standards of legibility, so an edition in modern notation is also very welcome.

The editors have made minimal intervention to create consistency with slurs and occasional missing accidentals; they have also replaced the soprano clef with alto or treble clefs, using a small symbol to show where this has been done. The playing parts are of exemplary clarity, without any awkward turns of page. In his Vorbericht (Preface) Kühnel explains that he uses the numbers 1 – 4 to show the left hand fingering, with the usual comma sign for a trill. He says that since ornamentation is so difficult to notate in an exact manner, he leaves it to the good taste and skill of the performer to add further decoration to the music. His intention also is to provide some music for the less experienced player and some for the more advanced – relative terms, since the easiest pieces here still require a reasonably good hand and bow. The composer suggests that the basso continuo for the first three sonatas is optional – certainly it doesn't require a third bass viol. One or other of the viols is usually touching upon the *basso* line, but at times both instruments depart from it sufficiently that a theorbo or keyboard could be usefully employed.

Sonata I in F major has an introductory *sinfonia* movement, double stops in Viol 1 and flowing quavers derived from the basso part for Viol 2. There follow four movements, *Allegro*, *Adagio*, *Aria* and *Allegro*, the *Adagio* and *Aria* featuring some elaborate variations. Sonata II in E minor has a similar introductory movement, followed by a spacious *Aria* of four sections in 3/2, leading in to a *canzona*-like section and ending with a short *Allegro*. The next movement is an *Aria Allegro*, on a binary form ground bass, with divisions for both instruments. A broad *Adagio* with juicy suspensions closes the sonata. Sonata III in G minor is a binary form ground bass, quite chromatic, developed with elaborate divisions for both instruments, the final section being a *gigue*-like 12/8.

The next three items (Nos IV – VI) are each titled *Sonatina à 2*, and take the format of a suite of dances. Here the basso continuo definitely requires a third instrument, which could be a third bass viol or any combination with keyboard, theorbo, etc. *Sonatina IV* is in C major, opening with an *Allegro* in fugato style, followed by *Allemande*, *Corrente*, *Sarabande*, *Gavot* and *Giga*. Bass Viol 1 lies quite high in tessitura, Viol 2 is in a comfortable middle range, perhaps suiting the less experienced player mentioned by Kühnel in his preface. No. V in C minor has the title *Serenata*, and is reminiscent of suites by Schmelzer or Biber, with an opening movement *Adagio-Allegro-Adagio*, followed by an *Entrata presto*, *Aria adagio*, *Gavotta allegro*, *Sarabande adagio*, *Giga allegro* and ending with a *Retirata presto*. *Sonatina VI* in C major is titled *Echo*, the opening *Allegro* providing multiple opportunities for repeated phrases played loud and then soft. The suite concludes with a *Gavotta*, *Sarabande* and *Giga*.

Altogether this is very charming music for bass viol players (the upper part of the *Sonatinas* can be played on a tenor viol). The first three sonatas where the two parts cross each other are overall more technically demanding than the next three *Sonatinas* where Viol 1 is always the top part. That said, the technical demands are not as heavy as in Kühnel's solo works. The music is generally in a style comparable with Becker, Hacquart, Höffler, Schenck and other contemporaries, being designed for *bürgerlich* entertainment in a familiar 17th century musical idiom. The next three volumes in the series will supply all the music for solo viol, some playable unaccompanied but mostly with basso continuo. The editors are to be congratulated on producing these two excellent editions.

Ian Gammie