

THE VIOL No 23 Summer 2011

David Funck *Stricturae viola-di gambicae* for 4 viols in 3 volumes: Edition Güntersberg G205, G206 and G207

David Funck will be fairly unfamiliar to most viol players. He was born in 1648 in Sankt Joachimsthal (which is Czech today) and died in what is now former East Germany in 1701. He was the secretary to Princess Eleonore of Schleswig-Holstein, composition teacher and choirmaster in Reichenbach, organist in Wunsiedel and later in Ilmenau, where he died. He was a player of various instruments, apart from the organ, namely the violin, the viola (most likely to be a viol(?), as the German Preface refers to it as the 'Viola' as well), the guitar and the clavichord. The preface mentions that his life was eventful and not lacking scandals and that undoubtedly for this reason Funck found his way into two novellas by E. Polko (1896) and F.A. Zimmer (1940). Having recorded some of these pieces before and being more familiar with Funck than most players, I seem to remember that the scandals that are referred to here involved underage boys. Perhaps this is an explanation for the frequent job changes (which are by no means unusually many), most significantly moving from choirmaster to organist. Looking at the old CD booklet and the information about Funck there (presumably taken from the New Grove) he was denounced for serial alcohol abuse in 1686, was suspected of 'Criminis Sodomiae', labelled a 'wicked man' (boeser Mensch) and later froze to death en route to Arnstadt. This is not improbable, as my old school atlas tells me that Arnstadt and Ilmenau are about 10km apart.

Stricturae viola-di gambicae is Funck's only surviving work (1677), and can be found only in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. All four part books are labelled Viola da Gamba and the work consists of 43 consecutively numbered four-part pieces. These can be grouped into Sonata-like units easily, which is something that – as far as I can recollect – was done in a previous much older (Dutch?) edition of these pieces. I believe that this older edition has been long out of print and that I was fortunate enough to get hold of a copy c. 10 years ago. There are many dance movements, such as Allemandes, Courantes, Sarabandes and Giges, many Airs, and occasionally pieces with more unusual titles: Amener and Lamento. The music reminds much of Michael Nicolai's music, also of course in the choice of instrumentation. The top viol part is occasionally a little higher than is comfortable for non-professionals (high d often, and rarely e), but the keys are well within the comfort zone, and the part can very successfully be played on a tenor viol if necessary. I am most familiar with the first set of pieces from volume 2 (G206) which starts with a busy and exciting fugue-like movement, followed by the most beautiful Saraband with variations (shared out amongst all 4 players) and ends with a crazy Gigue. I remember this music fondly as something soothing as well as exhilarating, and it should have the same effect on everyone who likes 17th century German/Bohemian/Austrian music. Great to have a good edition that is readily available!

Susanne Heinrich