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Conrad Höffler *PRIMITIÆ CHELICÆ* (1695) 12 Suiten für Viola da Gamba und Basso continuo. Suiten I-IV Edition Güntersberg

This is the first set of Höffler's gamba music to be issued in a scholarly modern edition by Güntersberg. Supplied within is a substantial introduction in German by Thomas Fritzsch (about 8 pages), its synopsis in English and a brief foreword by the editors. There is also a reproduction of Höffler's own foreword in the original as well as an extract of the first suite in facsimile, very clearly reproduced. The score shows the gamba part and basso continuo together just like in the original, and there is a separate bass part with figures, and finally the solo gamba part; there is no keyboard realisation such as the ones I have encountered in previous Güntersberg editions.

Höffler was born in 1647 in Nuremberg and died in Weissenfels in 1696. He worked at the court of Duke August of Saxony-Weissenfels where the violinist Johan Philipp Krieger was a colleague. Höffler's style echos the stylus phantasticus school of violin playing and in this respect is similar to Johann Schenck's earlier style and that of August Kühnel and Godfrey Finger. The first sonata of this set for example begins with a 'Preludio' with interspersing Adagio and pedal sections over which the gamba decorates with continuous streams of quick notes, and is then followed by a substantial 'Fuga'.

Höffler's gamba writing is very chordal (again, like Schenck in *Tyd en Konst-Oeffeningen*, 1688), and extremely virtuosic- passages go very high on the top string (up to high f) and punctuated by chords. This is primarily virtuoso music designed to show off the gambist's technical prowess; the music itself - perhaps not surprisingly, due to the composer's admitted 'casual approach to the rules of counterpoint and the fugue' - does at times feel secondary.

I have two thoughts regarding this particular Güntersberg publication. 1) is the absence of an English translation of Fritzsch's introduction which is a pity. 2) a slightly more controversial issue, is whether it's feasible - since the original is already 'very cleanly engraved' and 'entirely legible' - to reproduce the facsimile score in its entirety, with bar numbers, and have the gamba and continuo parts in modern notation.

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