

Conrad Höffler, *Primitiæ Chelicæ*, Nurnberg 1695, 12 Suites for Viola da gamba and Basso continuo, ed. G. and L. von Zadow. Edition Güntersberg, 2011. Score, solo viol, in three volumes: G211, Suites I–IV, ISMN 979–0–50174–211–0, €17.50; G212, Suites V–VIII, ISMN 979–0–50174–212–7, €17.50; G213, Suites IX–XII, ISMN 979–0–50174–213–4, €17.50.



Conrad Höffler's 1695 volume of twelve suites, entitled *Primitiæ Chelicæ*, exists in a single copy located in the Council School Library in Zwickau, Germany. The Güntersberg publication is the first performing edition available, although the suites appear in a score version in volume 67 of *Das Erbe deutscher Musik* (Kassel: Nagels Verlag, 1973). Thomas Fritsch has written a meticulously researched biography of Höffler and an analysis of his compositional

style, and it is included as a preface in the first volume of the new Güntersberg edition. While the English texts in the Güntersberg edition provide only a synopsis of Fritsch's excellent essay, a complete English translation appears in the *Journal of the VdGSA*, vol. XLVI (2011), pp. 21–36 (translated by C. Kyprianides).

Höffler (1647–1696) was born in Nuremberg and worked as a court musician in Bavaria and Saxony, notably as a colleague of Johann Phillip Krieger. His suites are typical of their time, all following the traditional order of Allemand, Courant or Corrente, Saraband, and Giga. The dance movements are more Italianate than French, and are for the most part harmonically and rhythmically uncomplicated. Five of the suites begin with a Preludio or a Sonata; these contain the most interesting and virtuosic music of the collection, with rapid passagework and complex contrapuntal writing. Judging from the viol parts in Krieger's trio sonatas, Höffler was a highly skilled player, and this is equally reflected in his suites, composed in the *style brisé* common to lute and viol music of the period. They are technically demanding with frequent double stops and chords, comparable to the works of Höffler's contemporaries Johan Schenck and August Kühnel.

Besides the usual technical difficulties presented by music of this period, Höffler's suites are musically problematic. Although his pieces have many attractive and original aspects, he was relatively untrained as a composer, and his lack of experience is manifest in this, his only publication. Sixteenth-note passages tend to meander, with awkward intervals and octave shifts; harmonic changes are abrupt and unexpected; chords are voiced in confusing inversions; implied contrapuntal voices disappear without resolution. Höffler defended his approach to counterpoint in a brief foreword "to the musical Reader," described in detail by Fritsch, but his unclear harmonic rhythms and inconclusive voice leadings often render the music incomprehensible. Many of these problems are resolved once the basso continuo line is present; it is therefore helpful to practice with the score.

Güntersberg has published the twelve suites in three volumes of four suites each, without a realization of the basso continuo. If needed, the score of the 1973 Nagel edition includes a suitable realization.

Caveats aside, we can only applaud Güntersberg for publishing these two intriguing works from the late seventeenth-century, valuable additions to the repertoire for viol and basso continuo.