

Review regarding G226 und G227 by Robert Oliver to be published in Brian Clark's Early Music Review.
Received 17.03.2013

Music for Viola da Gamba and Cembalo/Pianoforte
Edition Güntersberg

Johann Christian Bach
Edited Thomas Fritzsich and Günter von Zadow

The four Sonatas for viola da gamba and keyboard by the 'London Bach' are published here for the first time. I reviewed a performance of them by one of the editors, Thomas Fritzsich, viola da gamba, with Shalev Ad-El, fortepiano and harpsichord, some issues ago, and found them delightful listening and an important addition to the repertoire. This publication makes them available to players at a reasonable price – two volumes at €17.50 according to their current catalogue. The layout is excellent, and the parts are provided in both alto clef and treble to be played in the lower octave. I have only one very minor complaint, and that is the lack of a facsimile example of any of the sources.

In every respect, however, this is an excellent production, and a worthy, not to say essential part of any viol-player's library. The musical type is very clear and elegant, page turns are well organised, and the music is very rewarding for the viol player, without being technically advanced.

The excellent introductory notes by Thomas Fritzsich describe the fascinating story of their discovery, leading to the first modern performance in 2008. The technical level of the gamba part is not nearly as demanding as that of Abel's music, and the viol is always in an accompanying role, so the question arises, for whom were these sonatas written. His suggestion that a possible performer was the artist Thomas Gainsborough, an accomplished amateur player and pupil of Abel, is reinforced by the Gainsborough's fine portrait of the composer which graces the cover of each volume.

Volume one has two sonatas described as for *Cembalo e Viola da Gamba obligato* with the viol part written in treble clef. The first, in B flat major, has two movements, as they all do, *allegro* and *allegro assai*. The former uses the theme of the prelude of J.S.B's Partita BWV825 in B Flat, with the viol providing a simple but elegant third part to the predominantly two-part cembalo writing. Neither movement provides a particularly challenging viol part, and the hypothesis that Gainsborough played them seems appropriate to their technical level. The second sonata in G major is melodically much more like C.P.E's though far less extravagant in its range and technical demands.

Volume two has two further sonatas, both in F major, the first designated *Sonata a Piano Forte e Viola da Gamba*, and the second merely *Sonata a Piano e Forte*, so the accompanying role is explicit. In fact, in another document, Bach himself described one of the sonatas as a "musical composition for the Harpsichord called a Sonata together with an accompaniment for the Viol da Gamba". The second of the two is a little more demanding for the viol, and all of them demand a level of agility and certainly taste. The far more demanding cembalo parts give rise to the pleasing picture Thomas Fritzsich imagines in his introduction, of J.C. playing them accompanied by his portraitist.

They are well worth having for students, but teachers would also enjoy playing them as the music is well worth the attention of good players.