

THE VIOL No 33, Winter 2014-14

Johann Christoph Pepusch *Sonata H-Moll für Violine, Viola da Gamba und Basso continuo* (Cook 2:029) Edition Güntersberg G232

Introduction by Peter Holman, Edited by Günter und Leonore von Zadow

In this edition Peter Holman provides details of the composer and his compositions, a précis of which follows: “Johann Christoph Pepusch was born in 1667 in Berlin and worked at the Prussian court before coming to London in the late 1690s, perhaps in the entourage of William III following the Peace of Ryswick in 1697. Charles Burney wrote that he was a viola player in the orchestra at Drury Lane theatre. He also played the harpsichord in the Italian opera company at the Haymarket Theatre from its inception in 1706-7; he is most famous today for arranging the music for *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728).

“Pepusch wrote a good deal of chamber music in his first years in London for performance in concerts, for teaching purposes or just for publication. A number of his sonatas have *obbligato* parts for the viola da gamba, reflecting the continued popularity of the instrument in England and the fact that one of his colleagues in the opera orchestra at the Haymarket Theatre, Pietro Chaboud, played it as well as the flute and bassoon.

Although this sonata might be thought to be related to the German seventeenth-century tradition of sonatas for violin, bass viol and continuo, or two violins, bass viol and continuo, represented by works by Buxtehude, Erlebach, Reincken and others, its musical idiom is derived from modern Italian music, in particular Sonatas by Albinoni opp. 1 (1694) and 2 (1700). Like Albinoni, Pepusch laid out his sonatas in the slow-fast-slow-fast *da chiesa* pattern.”

This sonata is a charming piece and has a very approachable gamba part. The majority of the writing is high in the range of the bass viol where it blends with the violin to great effect. The second movement starts with a fugue subject in the viol part that needs to go at a good speed to make sense of the rhythm of the theme. The following semiquaver string crossing passages over three strings are consequently ‘quite nippy’ but lie under the hand in chordal shapes. The third movement is another example of Pepusch’s ability to write simple but beautiful melodies. The last movement starts with the theme in the violin part, but the gamba quickly enters in the second bar with a counter melody. In the second half the writing starts the opposite way round with the gamba playing the same theme down a major 6th, which starts on the top string.

This edition is well laid out and easy to read on good quality paper and comes with a separate Basso Continuo part with figures as well as a realised part in the score by Dankwark von Zadow. The only little gripe is two slightly, for want of a better word, ‘cheesy’ suspensions in the Third Movement, Adagio in bars 4 and 11, in the realisation. Also a possible erroneous figure in the penultimate bar of the Second Movement, Allegro. At €16.50 this is at the top end of the price range for an edition such as this, but well worth it for the introduction by Peter Holman, which is in both German and English. My thanks to Rosemary Robinson and Michael Williamson for playing this sonata with me and for their comments.

Jacqui Robertson-Wade