

Johann Gottfried Mente, Suite für die Gambe und Generalbass [Suite for Viola da Gamba and Basso Continuo] (Leipzig, 1759)

ed. Günter and Leonore von Zadow. Edition Güntersberg, G272, 2015, ISMN 979-0-50174-272-1. Score and parts, €13.80.

Johann Gottfried Mente (1698–c.1760) is hardly a household name, even among connoisseurs of eighteenth-century viol music, but this new edition makes the thought of getting to know him better an attractive proposition. I must confess that, despite my familiarity with a couple of books that mention Mente, he had slipped from my mind until this new edition appeared. Perhaps my previous lack of familiarity with any of his music was partly to blame. I expect that I was not alone in this, because as recently as two decades ago, it was still assumed that all of Mente's viol music was lost.¹ A 1762 catalog of works in manuscript offered for sale by the Leipzig publisher Breitkopf listed nine pieces by Mente for gamba and continuo, none traceable today: six sonatas and three suites (in D major, A major, and D minor).² Despite Mente's impressive reputation as a formidable virtuoso viol player who taught a succession of accomplished students, the present suite, here in its first modern edition, is apparently his only surviving piece for the instrument.

Much of what we know about his life comes from the autobiographical report the forty-one-year-old Mente supplied for inclusion in Johann Mattheson's encyclopedic *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte* (Hamburg, 1740). Mente learned composition, keyboards, gamba, and lute from his father, who was a customs inspector, judge, and organist in Rotenburg an der Oder, and received further instruction in Frankfurt an der Oder from Martin Simon. He acquired a prestigious position as organist at the Liebfraukirche in Liegnitz, Silesia (known as Legnica in current-day Poland) where he was also sought out as a teacher of the viola da gamba. Among his many noble students was a Russian, Count Zierotin, who was able to play with ease on the viol an arrangement his teacher had made of the violin solo to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. This arrangement, unfortunately lost, makes a fascinating counterpart to the early-eighteenth-century arrangement of Corelli's op. 5 violin sonatas for viol and continuo.

The source for the Güntersberg edition of this suite is the first edition, published by Johann Gottlob Immanuel Breitkopf in Leipzig in 1759, a copy of which survives in the Russian State

Library, Moscow. Unlike much of the eighteenth-century music that we know today in facsimiles, the original edition of this suite was not elegantly engraved, but rendered in an altogether clumsier fashion, in a style of musical movable-type printing more commonly used for music examples in treatises than for the publication of actual works of music. This more economical method of publication suggests that the original edition was likely produced in a very limited print run, perhaps fewer than two dozen copies. Because the movable type was not nearly as nice to read as good engraving, this new edition is all the more welcome. Striking are Mente's Italian titles to two of his four movements: *Lamento* and *Scherzando*. Even more telling, however, is the complete title of the opening movement, *Lamento: Adagio a la Francese*, for a piece that resembles more closely than anything else a tombeau or prelude by Marais, whose style was apparently still alive in Germany more than three decades after the French virtuoso's death. The other two movements, a Menuet and a Polonoise, are both named in French. While the former was a popular French dance, the latter pays tribute to a style that was for Mente even closer to home. Overall in his Suite, the model that comes to mind is Marais. It is only in the second movement *Scherzando* that the German *galant* style seems to get the upper hand. Mente's writing for the instrument is, like Marais's, gratifying for the player and perfectly idiomatic. Like his French predecessors, he includes many fingerings and a variety of typical ornaments. The style is rich with *tirades* of fast notes and rich chords. For the middle of the A section of the *Lamento*, Mente supplies an alternative, embellished version, which could be used for the repeat. The edition includes an informative introduction in German with a good English translation by Howard Weiner, and several facsimile images from the edition of 1759.

Günter and Leonore von Zadow continue to serve their favored instrument and its many modern devotees admirably. As we have come to expect from Güntersberg, the standards of preparation and presentation of the edition are excellent and the price is reasonable. While the music has its technical challenges, it is accessible to players who have a little bit of experience with Marais. This is a lovely piece that fills a part of the gulf between French and German music. It is a most welcome addition to the repertoire, both for study and performance.

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¹ Fred Flässig, *Die solistische Gambenmusik in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Cuviller Verlag, 1996), 135–36.

² Bettina Hoffmann, *Catalogo della musica solistica e cameristica per viola da gamba* (Lucca: Lim Antiqua, 2001), 131.