

Pietro Castrucci *Sonata in G minor for Viola da Gamba and Basso*
Ed. Thomas Fritzsich and Günter von Zadow
Edition Güntersberg G287

This is another first modern edition of a sonata mined from the *Ledenburg-Sammlung*. This library consists primarily of viol music, some of it originally composed for viol, including the recently re-discovered Telemann Fantasias, but also including many pieces originally composed for other instruments and transcribed for the viol; this is one such case, apparently transcribed from a flute sonata, a flute sonata, mind you, by a violinist-composer...

Pietro Castrucci (1679-1752), born in Rome, was clearly a violinist of the first rank. He is thought to have studied with Corelli, and his career intersects with Handel's; both were in the service of Marchese Ruspoli in their early career, and Castrucci later moved to London and became the leader of Handel's opera orchestra. (Castrucci devised a sympathetic-strung viola, the 'violetta marina' – for which Handel composed an obbligato in *Orlando*.)

The sonata before us has not been found in any other source; it is identified in the copy as transcribed from a flute sonata, which instrument is well-represented in Castrucci's output. Two and a half centuries ago, the Baroness von Grothaus thought the piece worthy of transcription for the viol for her own consumption – the question to consider now is, was this one of her better ideas?

Yes, I think so! I am very glad to have this on my shelves, and will re-visit the music with pleasure. One can tell that it is not written with the viol in mind, but neither is it particularly awkward to play. Castrucci's melodic working in the minor key occasionally generates augmented and diminished intervals which sound and feel awkward at first, but I soon found them quite charming. I found the first *affectuoso* movement the most rewarding, the following 3/4 Allegro scarcely less so, despite arpeggiated melodic material which necessitates occasional hard-to-prepare visits beyond the frets, and the sonata is rounded off with a very cheerful Giga which affords some reminders of Vivaldi's final sonata movements. This is *really* enjoyable music to play, written by a composer with a gift for a good tune and a sure grip of his craft; he knows how long to stay with the same material, he knows when we want to move on, he knows how to use chromatic harmony to lead us to a new place. This is a sonata which could easily slip unnoticed into a book of Vivaldi violin sonatas or Handel recorder sonatas.

We have learned to trust the quality of the Güntersberg 'package' of thoughtful preparation, engraving and presentation, editorial and introductory material (in German and English). We are given a seven-page reference score (solo line and unfigured bass), separate parts for viol and bass instrument, and a realized (and editorially figured) keyboard score. I must confess I found myself much more interested in playing the piece for my own pleasure than spending time with a fine-toothed comb looking for possible editorial mistakes; none caught my attention, with one little exception: the editor takes the bass line down an octave in bars 73-74 of the Allegro. To my ears, bar 13

of the same movement represents a more obvious need for this recourse, but that's a pretty trivial grumble. Bars 16-17 and 67-69 of the Allegro are horrible, but that might have been Castrucci's (or a copyist's) fault.

All in all, thoroughly recommended. Enjoy.

Piers Snell

The Viola No 45
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