

Friedrich Schwindl

Sonata in A major

for Viola da Gamba, Violin and Basso

Ed. Thomas Fritsch and Günter von Zadow Edition

Güntersberg G293

Our friends at Güntersberg bring us another first

modern edition of a trio sonata quarried from the *Ledenburg-Sammlung*. This library consists mainly of viol music, some of it originally composed for viol, but also including many pieces originally composed for other instruments and transcribed for the viol; this is one such, a trio sonata for viol and violin transcribed from a two-flute trio sonata.

Friedrich Schwindl (1737-1786), born in Amsterdam, was active internationally as a violinist and composer, and well thought of by his contemporaries. His output included twenty-eight symphonies and fifty chamber works including twenty trios – but no known compositions for the viol. His contemporary Schubart tells us that Schwindl ‘does not compose weightily, but all the more appealingly for amateurs,’ which seems about fair. Style-wise, this piece falls into the grey area between baroque, *galant*, *empfindsam*, and early-classical: tuneful, not particularly challenging music for amateurs to pass the time of day with.

Two and a half centuries ago, the Baroness von Grothaus thought the piece worthy of transcription for the viol for her own consumption. We would be unlikely, in sampling this piece, to guess that it had been composed by a viol-player, but it is by no means particularly awkward for any player reasonably comfortable up to an octave on the top string.

I wish I could summon a little more enthusiasm for the music itself: well-crafted melodic material, but nothing very memorable or distinctive. The viol and violin more or less ‘take turns’ with the tune, which is habitually doubled in thirds and sixths by the other player, with contrapuntal interest in short supply. Nor does the harmonic treatment offer very much:

lots of tonic and dominant, interspersed with pedal-points and routine sequences leading to re-statements of the same material in different keys. One might hope *either* for a piece that was simply more interesting and characterful than this, *or* for a piece that felt that it belonged on our instrument. Alas, for this reader, neither box is ticked. Nevertheless, if this is the sort of repertoire you like to dip your toes into from time to time, the piece does what it sets out to do very pleasantly.

The quality of the performance materials is well up to Güntersberg’s usual high standard. The parts are well laid out, carefully edited, presentably engraved and attractively packaged, with an informative editorial introduction. We are given a score (bass figured but unrealised) and three separate parts. I do have to register some disappointment at the absence of a continuo realisation; it may be human frailty on my part, but my own figured-bass skills get a bit shaky when faced with alto clefs mixed with other clefs, especially when the score is laid out with the viol part written above the violin part, (which presumably simply reflects the original, but feels deeply counter-intuitive to follow).

Piers Snell