

Benjamin Hely

Six Sonatas for two bass violas da gamba
and basso continuo
Güntersberg G317, G318



Violists know Benjamin Hely for his *Compleat Violist* published in London in 1699, but now the indefatigable Günter and Leonore von Zadow have brought out his Six Sonatas for two bass viols and a thorough bass, which date from some time in the 1680s or 90s. Ben Hebbert has recently discovered that Hely died in the apartment above Barack Norman's workshop, and that he almost certainly visited Barbados. What an intriguing thought that he might have improvised on a Barack Norman in some Caribbean plantation house!

There are two sources for the edition, both in the Bodleian Library: one with all three parts throughout in the composer's hand, and another with just the two solo parts in another hand. The music itself clearly references the forms and vocabulary of Corelli's trio sonatas with touches of an earlier age and the indulgent texture is itself enough of a *raison d'être*. An interesting feature in the first viol part is the use of one to four dots indicating the finger to be used.

The parts are beautifully printed in Güntersberg's customary typeface, but why, oh why, (and how often does one have to say this?) do there have to be unnecessary page turns within a sonata which would easily fit on two pages? In sonata number five, the six or seven lines of the last allegro over the page could, in all parts, have easily been accommodated in the enormous gaps between the lines of the previous movement. This would mean that the whole of the following sonata could as well have been printed on two pages and thus played (and understood) as a unit. Why can't modern editors learn from the originals, which are generally more usefully laid out?

The editing policy is also perhaps rather too fussy for many of us. We don't need the anachronistic 'G.P.' at the beginning of movements, nor does it need to be suggested (albeit in brackets) that an exact repeat of the last two bars of a piece can be played *piano*. Nor is it necessary to print a one-bar cue of what we hear in the other part before coming in. Surely, in fugal music, we can be trusted to listen and imitate? It's all a little too redolent of those annoying German editions of yesteryear, in which the editor cannot resist telling you that you are playing the theme or the counter-theme. Keep it clean and simple please, just like the originals! I would also prefer the realisation of the figured bass in small type, so that it can be more easily ignored by continuo players on their way to autonomous realisation.

Such niggles notwithstanding, these pieces will be very useful at domestic bass viol gatherings – perhaps even occasionally on the concert platform – to add to our trios by Marais, Forqueray and Nikolai.

Charles Medlam

Sheet music reviews are coordinated by Jenny Tribe, 63 Leckhampton Road, Cheltenham, Glos, GL53 0BS (email jenny_tribe@hotmail.com). Please send any music direct to her.

Comments on Charles Medlam's review on Hely (G317–318)

We will modify the page layout of the three parts of G318, so that each Sonata is contained on one double sheet. Thank you for this remark.

We will omit the 'G.P.'

We will keep the '[piano]'. If in the original 'piano' is written in one part but not in the other(s), we have added '[piano]' where it is missing.

We will not change the type size of the realization. This edition comes with two full scores, one with realization and one without it. If you want to ignore the realization use the other full score.

The changes will be effective with the next print run.

Günter von Zadow,
02 April 2018