

Dietrich Becker: Sonata in A major for Violin, Viola da Gamba and Basso Continuo

ed. Günter and Leonore von Zadow with continuo realization by Dankwart von Zadow, Edition Güntersberg, G320, 2017. ISMN 979-0-50174-320-9. Score and parts, €16.00.

Johann Michael Nicolai: Sonata 14: Trio Sonata in G minor for Violin, Viola da Gamba and Basso Continuo

ed. Günter and Leonore von Zadow with continuo realization by Dankwart von Zadow, Edition Güntersberg, G327, 2019. ISMN 979-0-50174-327-8. Score and parts, €16.80.

The trio sonata, usually understood as a piece for two treble instruments with basso continuo, was a staple of composers from early in the seventeenth century until late into the eighteenth, when the string quartet took its place as the most widely used genre in chamber music. Trio sonatas for violin, viola da gamba, and basso continuo are less common than those for two treble instruments, but perhaps more prevalent than many of us assume. Mid-seventeenth-century Germany was especially fertile ground for this formation. Combining the two different instruments with their complementary ranges and varying tone colors provides contrast and tonal richness of sound not associated with the more typical instrumentation. Because of the viol's relative scarcity, its eventual waning, and later resurgence, this type of trio sonata can be particularly poignant. These pieces are, naturally, treasured by gamba players who relish the opportunity to leave the bass to play a melody line, and by violinists who enjoy the chance to partner and converse with a gamba. The best-known sonatas of this type are those by Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707), particularly his op. 1 (1694) and op. 2 (1696) sets, each consisting of seven such pieces, but this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Edition Güntersberg has released first editions of violin and gamba trio sonatas by two of Buxtehude's younger contemporaries, Dietrich Becker (1623-1679) and Johann Michael Nicolai (1629-1685). Although theirs are not household names, Johann Sebastian Bach was aware of

both composers and admired their work, just as he did Buxtehude's, which in itself is reason for us to take note and be glad when a publisher brings this music to light. Güntersberg's new issues of these two worthy trio sonatas for violin, viola da gamba, and basso continuo by Becker (2017) and Nicolai (2019) both come from collections of pieces by other composers and were unknown until these editions.

The Nicolai is a particularly appealing piece. The contrapuntal opening section of the piece, characterized by rising, chromatic eighth notes, flows into a sumptuous adagio, leading to dueling Italianate solos. While the violin is more extensively featured, both solo parts are full of divisions. A short adagio sets off the rest of the piece: a lively jig in 12/8 followed by a common-time section reminiscent of the opening, with exchanges of sixteenth notes between the solo parts, before winding down in a final four-measure adagio. The editor has suggested some accidentals in parentheses, which generally make good musical sense. However, as a performer, I would make some different decisions about accidentals and found at least one note I would change altogether. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the editorial accidentals are meant to carry through the entire measure.

The A-major trio sonata by Becker opens in a strikingly different manner from the Nicolai. Instead of the busy eighth and sixteenth notes of the Nicolai, we have a rhetorically arresting beginning. Each of the first three measures of this slow 3/2 movement consists of long, held chords, before the bass line begins its steady half-note motion. For much of the movement the viol is playing double stops in thirds, the lower note in synch with the bass, while the violin sustains longer notes above. The next movement is



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Dietrich Becker

Sonata A-Dur für
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und Basso continuo



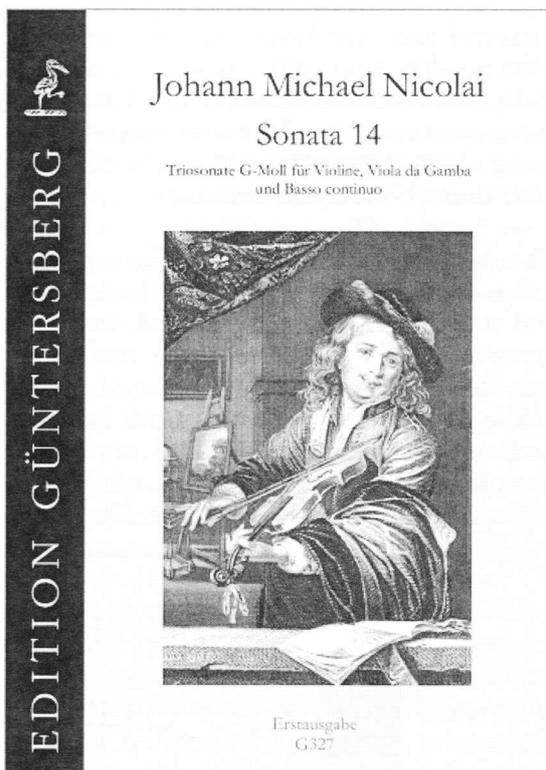
Erstausgabe
G320

contrapuntal and in duple time, similar to the opening of the Nicolai, if somewhat less inventive. The intervening adagio in F-sharp minor presents good opportunities for ornamentation. Following this, each solo instrument gets its own movement. The gamba is declamatory against the bass in an energetic cut time. By contrast, the violin in 3/2 time gradually builds speed, beginning in half notes, continuing in quarters, and finally in eighths. Both solos are flashy and fun to play. The piece concludes with a tutti in a 6/4 time allegro, sandwiched between two short adagios.

As we have come to expect with Güntersberg publications, the music is nicely printed with page turns well worked out, and editorial decisions indicated and explained. The editors provide excellent introductions, informative about the

hear some of this music in the pleasing and well researched editions brought to us by this wonderful publisher.

Risa Browder
Arlington, Virginia



sources and with interesting and relevant biographical details about the composers. Both include three parts and two scores: individual parts for the violin, the viola da gamba, and the bass (with figures), as well as two scores (both with figures, one with a keyboard realization, and one without). Having the choice of continuo parts makes the edition attractive to a range of keyboard players, from the amateur who might prefer a realized continuo part, to the professional who wants only a bass part with figures, or a score without realization so that they can create their own chords.

Güntersberg continues to produce excellent editions of interesting and unknown chamber music with viola da gamba from the untapped wealth of German repertoire of the generation before Bach. Specialists in historical performance and others alike will enjoy the opportunity to play and