
**Herman Gustav Jaeschke:
Variations on a theme
for viola da gamba and pianoforte (c1840)
Güntersberg G325**

Hermann Gustav Jäschke (or Jaeschke) is not a familiar name, nor one that trips easily off the English tongue; yet, here we have a set of variations by him written specifically for the viol and piano sometime in the 1840s.

It was a surprise to me that original viol music was being written in the middle of the nineteenth century, further emphasising the fact that the viol didn't die in that century, and the tenuous link between Abel and Dolmetsch seems to get stronger the more we look. ►



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The work comes from the extraordinary collection that has recently been brought to light from Militsch in Silesia, that part of Prussia that is now western Poland. Specifically it was Joachim Carl Graf Maltzan, ambassador to London in the 1780s, who brought back a large collection of viol music by Abel to his castle, and whose son and grandson also played the viol, and who presumably were the players of this music. The whole collection was discovered by Sonia Wronkowska, who has written a detailed description of the contents.

The work in question comprises an introduction, theme and two variations on a song from the opera *Joseph* by Étienne-Nicolas Méhul. Such things were very popular and this theme was also the subject of variations by Weber and Franz Xaver Mozart.

About Jäschke we know, of course, not very much. Born in 1818 in Breslau, he was a violin virtuoso and blind, memorising all the music he played. We don't know when he died, but certainly after 1846.

The piece is attractive and demanding, demanding in a different way from eighteenth- or seventeenth-

century virtuoso viol music. The running demi-semiquavers will need clever fingering to make them fluid enough; but articulation is left up to the performer, so that will help.

The edition is what we have come to expect from Edition Güntersberg: excellent in all respects. The viol part is presented in alto and bass clefs and has no page turn problems.

The introduction mentions four other composers represented in the collection from the nineteenth century, so perhaps a large enough repertory will emerge. It also points to a recording that Thomas Fritsch has made, called *The 19th Century Viol**, so we may hope that Edition Güntersberg will publish this music as well, and that we will have a repertory from the nineteenth century to call our own. Then we will have the possibility of presenting original music for viol from six centuries.

Richard Boothby

* Reviewed by Richard Rastall in *The Viol* no. 59. *Ed.*

