

Gottfried Finger – the Sünching Manuscript

David Hatcher, Piers Snell and Richard Boothby review Güntersberg's publications
edited by Günter and Leonore von Zadow, with basso continuo supplied by Wolfgang Kostujak

Gottfried Finger
Suite in D major with Passaglia
for two violas da gamba and basso continuo
Edition Güntersberg G338

Gottfried Finger, roughly contemporary with his more famous compatriot, Franz Biber, is probably still known more through his works for recorder than those for viol, yet the latter comprise a substantial portion of his surviving oeuvre. He was a player of the viol in the service of Bishop Liechtenstein-Castelcorno in Kroměříž, but left his homeland for London in the 1680s, where he remained until his now famous failure to succeed in the *Judgement of Paris* competition of 1701. Coming fourth after John Weldon, John Eccles and Daniel Purcell was too much an ignominy for the composer, who left almost immediately, travelling to Vienna, Berlin, Innsbruck and Mannheim, where he died in 1730.

Some of Finger's very fine works for viola da gamba have been known to us for a while through the musicology of, among others, Arthur Marshal, Richard Rawlinson and Fred Flassig. Marshal's editions of some of these, published by Dove House, and Robert Rawson and Petr Wagner's edition *The Music for Solo Viol* (Fretwork Editions), have long been part of my collection. The relatively recent attribution to Finger by Rawson and Flassig of the two partbooks in the collection at Sünching Castle, near Regensburg, have greatly increased Finger's opus of music for two viols, of a similar ilk to the sonatas by Kühnel and Schenk. Intriguingly, the Sünching collection is almost certainly incomplete: a basso continuo partbook must be missing as there are sections in a number of the pieces with extended solo movements or where both solo viols stop playing. Wolfgang Kostujak provides an intelligent and musical reconstruction of the bass part, with figures, in the Güntersberg edition.

I became well acquainted with Finger's works for two viols when recording a number of them in 2007 with Jessica Marshal. They all make considerable technical demands on their performers, with wide ranges, rapid and large leaps, double and treble-stopping well above the frets and numerous virtuoso passages. No exception to this is the Suite in D major, Sünching No.4, strikingly similar to the Suite in D major from an Oxford manuscript and published by Marshal (Dove House). In contrast to the through-composed Oxford suite, the Sünching work has more movements typical of the 17th century dance suite: *Praeludium*, *Allamanda*, *Guig*, *Courante*, *Gavotte* and *Pasaglia*. From the beginning of the *Praeludium*, the technical challenges are immediate and continue throughout the work, ending in a magnificent *tour de force*, the *Passaglia*, of some 284 bars and based on a simple

eight-note bass line. This final movement really does put the players through their paces, but remains a good choice for performance, being musically satisfying as well as offering a sparkling display of technicality.

For some while now, viola da gamba players have delighted in the numerous editions of music from Edition Güntersberg. They are clearly presented with excellent typography and informative notes accompanying each volume. Given the technical demands made by the current presentation, I think the suite will appeal to professional players more than amateurs, but it certainly deserves a place in the repertoire and will reward those prepared to put in the work required to bring it off.

David Hatcher

Gottfried Finger
Sonata Amoena
for two violas da gamba and basso continuo
Güntersberg G339
Intrada Violetta
for two treble viols and basso continuo
Edition Güntersberg G340

These two volumes represent my first acquaintance with material from the Sünching Manuscript. The source does not identify Finger as the composer, but the attribution (by Fred Flassig and Robert Rawson) is, I believe, uncontentious. The music is thought to date from around 1670, before Finger's arrival in London. Güntersberg have six volumes in their catalogue so far, of which these two are the most recent.

The materials at Sünching comprise two partbooks, but the editorial introduction makes a wholly compelling case for providing a reconstruction of the 'missing' bass part, which has been devised by Wolfgang Kostujak. I found the reconstructed bass part and the figuring entirely idiomatic and convincing. No realisation of the figured bass is provided, but the figuring is straightforward. (If omitted, there are passages, including extended 'solo' passages, which clearly do not work without an independent bass line.)

To the music itself: the term *violetta* is usually applied to alto/tenor range instruments, but this *Intrada* is unmistakably intended for two treble viols. The work runs to 171 bars of music, in four discrete sections, the fourth of which offers the players the opportunity to take turns in embellishing an aria without extending to the demisemiquavers that a Kühnel might have indulged in. This is playable by capable amateur players, but (my own personal response) not, alas, likely to inspire them very much: too many phrases that are measured in twos, fours and eights, and there is precious little adventure in harmonic or melodic invention.

The *Sonata Amoena*, on the other hand, is a piece of much higher artistic stature, more in accordance with the *stylus phantasticus* model, but technically rather daunting. My Latin dictionary translates *Amoena* as ‘comfortable’. No, it is not! The piece is notated in three sharps, but is incontrovertibly in the key of E major, which does not make the liberal prevalence of chordal writing any easier; one does wish the editors had modernised the key signature here, because this is quite hard enough already. This is music that is technically difficult, but will clearly deliver rewards to those who can meet its demands.

The quality of the performance materials is up to Güntersberg’s usual high standards. The parts are well laid out, carefully edited, presentably engraved and attractively packaged, with an informative editorial introduction. We are provided with a score (reconstructed bass figured but unrealised, as discussed) and three separate parts.

The *Intrada Violetta* is recommended to treble duet players who feel their repertoire list is in need of variety. The *Sonata Amoena* is recommended to the community of bass duet players with no sense of fear!

Piers Snell

Gottfried Finger
Sonata Augustiniana
for two bass viols, with optional basso continuo
Edition Güntersberg G336

When Fretwork Editions brought out the superb music for solo viol by Gottfried Finger, edited by Robert Rawson and Petr Wagner, I thought that I had all of Finger’s music for viol. But no! It seems that the Sünching manuscript, which consists of two part books labelled VIOLA DI GAMB: i & ii, contains several sonatas for two bass viols by Finger, proved by concordances and the fact that some of the music is autograph.

The ever-enterprising Edition Güntersberg has undertaken to publish all these pieces, and the work before me today is the *Sonata Augustiniana*, the sixth sonata of the set. It is a *stylus phantasticus* work in D minor, with a slow introduction, a fugal movement, a triple-time dance, a virtuosic solo section, first for the first viol, then exactly the same for the second, followed by the two viols together with similar material. Finally, there’s a short binary-section gigue to round the work off.

The material is very attractive, and makes moderate demands on the players: it stays on the frets for the most part, rising above in the aforementioned solos. The two parts are fairly equal, with the first part having a slightly larger and more prominent role.

As I said above, the manuscript has just two part books, and it is clear that a basso continuo part is missing. The editors of this edition have provided a part, with figures for a choral realisation. And here is my only reservation with this publication. Both solo parts occasionally jump down onto the lower strings to play a bass part, and I would have thought this would be the starting point for reconstructing a continuo part – but Wolfgang Kostujak doesn’t do this. On almost every occasion when this happens, he chooses to create different harmony than the one implied by the bass. Not only that, he manages frequently to take his bass line above the lower of the two viols, with the resulting inverted harmony. There are also too many figures – seventeenth-century music such as this often is left with no figures at all, or a few. The plethora of figures suggests JS Bach or French composers of a later era.

That said, this is a highly enjoyable piece to play, and I think it would be easily possible to create a more idiomatic continuo part.

Richard Boothby