

Christoph Schaffrath: Sonata in G major  
for Obligato Harpsichord and Viola da  
Gamba (CSWV:F:21)

ed. Günter and Leonore von Zadow. Continuo realization by  
Dankwart von Zadow. Introduction by Michael O'Loughlin.  
Edition Güntersberg (G379), 2020. ISMN 979-0-50174-379-  
7. €16.80.

**N**otwithstanding J. S. Bach's superb three sonatas  
for harpsichord and viola da gamba, or the  
variations by Chwatal reviewed in this issue,  
music explicitly scored for keyboard and viol was  
never particularly common. This could come as a surprise  
to those more familiar with the vast Classical and Romantic

body of sonatas for piano and melody instrument. However, well beyond 1750, the textbook cutoff date for the Baroque era, keyboardists were expected to be able to invent parts for the right hand from a composer's bass line, played by the left hand. A practical understanding of harmony and its tasteful realization on a keyboard, the practice known as basso continuo, was but a single facet of the many skills expected of those who aspired to be called *musicus* or musician. *Obbligato*, i.e., a written-out keyboard part, was hardly cultivated outside certain circles.

In Paris in 1734 Mondonville became the first composer anywhere to publish sonatas for obbligato harpsichord with accompanying instrument: his *Pièces de clavecin en sonates avec accompagnement de violon*, op. 3. Others followed suit, most notably Rameau with his *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* (1741) for harpsichord with one or two other instruments in various possible combinations, and Guignon with more violin sonatas. Most of J. S. Bach's sonatas for harpsichord and melody instrument, which include sonatas for violin and harpsichord and flute and harpsichord in addition to the gamba sonatas, clearly predate Mondonville's publication, but neither Bach's sonatas in this genre nor those of his circle or their successors in Germany were published until well into the nineteenth century, making it unlikely that they were known beyond a tight network of connoisseurs. Bach and his circle frequently referred to such pieces as trios: one part for each hand of the harpsichordist with a third line for another instrument. Indeed, in many cases these trios were arrangements of trio sonatas originally composed for two melody instruments and basso continuo. Even original pieces in this genre were often conceptually still treated as trios, with a more-or-less strict adherence to three-part writing: organ trios for one player, other trios for two, and "trio" sonatas frequently performed by four or more players. Such was Baroque math.

Christoph Schaffrath (1709–1763) was a representative of what C. F. D. Schubart two decades later would call the "world-famous Berlin School," populated by the composers who worked in and around the court of Frederick the Great in the mid-eighteenth century. Schaffrath joined the crown prince's court in 1734. A decade later, following Frederick's coronation in 1740, he moved to the court of Anna Amalia, the king's younger sister, where music was held in even higher regard than at the king's palace of Sans Souci. The obbligato sonata was an esteemed genre in this rarified milieu. Other Berlin School composers who wrote sonatas for viol and obbligato keyboard include C. P. E. Bach and J. G. Graun, as well Johann Pfeiffer in Bayreuth and J. C. Bach in London, both of whom had spent formative time in Berlin. Schaffrath himself wrote at least one other sonata for obbligato harpsichord and viol, in A major, previously also published by Güntersberg (G048) in 2003.

The present three-movement sonata has much to recommend it. It is an elegantly constructed example of the *emfindsamer*

style, the galant's counterbalance to its more turbulent *Sturm und Drang* side. The interplay between the two instruments in this piece unfolds like a conversation that draws the attention ever closer. The many chromatic appoggiaturas are used more to offer luxuriant aural pleasure than to elicit any sense of anxiety. While the two instruments are approximately equal in importance, Schaffrath does showcase the viol as soloist, with elegant melodies accompanied by the keyboard, and several passages of beautiful double stops in thirds. He writes with utter consideration for what will display the performer's ease at the instrument to best advantage (unlike J. G. Graun's more treacherous passages in thirds), delightfully without being trite. Nothing is especially difficult, but a convincing performance will require a sense of panache from the performer.

The beautiful edition is based on the composer's autograph, housed in the Berlin Amalien-Bibliothek, which at that time was supervised by Schaffrath. A high-quality scan of the manuscript is available for download from IMSLP. In this one can see that the gamba part was originally in octavated treble clef, a favorite of the Berlin School, and the right hand of the harpsichord part was notated in soprano clef, also not unusual for the time. The edition modernizes the clefs with alto for the gamba and treble for the right hand. It is also interesting to see that the original, despite being largely obbligato, includes passages of pure figured bass for the keyboard, for example the opening eight bars of the piece. These passages have all been realized in the edition.

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