

John Jenkins: Sixteen Airs a4, From the Hamburg Manuscript Dated 1683 for Two Treble and Two Bass Viols.

Reconstructed and edited by Andrew Ashbee. Edition Güntersberg, 2023.

Nos. 1-8. G411, ISNM 979-0-50174-411-4. €16.80. Nos. 9-16. G412, ISNM 979-0-50174-412-1. €16.80.

You can never have too much Jenkins. However, just four years ago Andrew Ashbee himself, editor of this new edition, wrote of these as-yet-unpublished pieces, "There is some attractive music in this series, but it is a miscellany rather than a cohesive group and unless the missing part comes to light (or is reconstructed) will inevitably remain in the shadow of the other works by Jenkins for this scoring."¹ Not exactly the quote a publisher would include in a press release. Perhaps Ashbee changed his mind, or maybe he was just so curious he had to do it, because shortly after writing these words, he went on to reconstruct the missing part, and did a fine job of it.

These are, in fact, delightful pieces. The source is a set of four parts in unmarked books, corresponding to treble 1, treble 2, bass 2, and basso continuo, apparently missing the bass 1 part. The books contain 153 pieces by various composers, with numbers 21-36 being the sixteen airs by John Jenkins (1592-1678). The manuscript is now in the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg shelfmark ND VI 3193. Scans can be seen on the library's website at resolver.sub.uni-hamburg.de/kitodo/HANShm299. The books were originally owned by Sir Gabriel Roberts (1629-1715) a merchant who served in prominent roles in the Levant Company, Royal African Company, and East India Company. His interest in music is evidenced by his bringing an apprentice to Aleppo in 1662, John Verney, who brought a lra viol along with him. Another apprentice in Aleppo at that time was Dudley North, a member of the family at whose home Jenkins taught in the 1650s and 1660s. (Aleppo must have been the scene of some great consort playing in the mid-seventeenth century.) The manuscript was eventually acquired in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Chrysander, noted editor of Handel's complete works, on one of his trips to London. It was in his collection when he sold it to the Hamburg library in 1875.

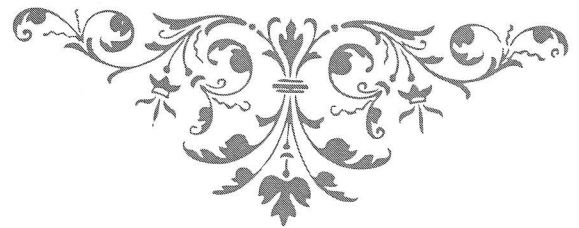
Not surprisingly, the two treble parts of these airs are rather high. They could be taken by violins but are, nevertheless, suitable for treble viols. The bass 2 part, which is original, alternates between doubling the the basso continuo and playing a higher, independent voice. Ashbee's reconstruction of the bass 1 part, in the manner of other Jenkins airs for two trebles and two basses, also takes turns, playing the bass line

when bass 2 goes high and having its own independent, higher part when bass 2 doubles the continuo. This reconstructed bass viol part is a lot of fun to play. The "basso continuo" part in the edition corresponds to a part in the original manuscript that appears to have no figures, at least not in these pieces by Jenkins. (Works by Jenkins occurring earlier in the same manuscript do include figures in the source.)

In the style of much other consort music of the period, including that of Jenkins, the editor has created a realization more like an organ reduction, which doubles the upper parts rather than filling in missing harmonies. These airs can therefore be played fully voiced without this basso continuo, though playing consorts with an organ, when available, can be revelatory. The airs are nearly all in binary form: i.e., a repeated A section followed by a repeated B section, except nos. 3, 11, and 16, which each include a triple-meter third strain. The individual designations of "air," "pavan," and "corant" are editorial, with the exceptions of no. 2 Air, no. 8 Corant, and nos. 9, 12, and 15 Pavans.

These pieces contain plenty of variety to sustain the interest of good consortiers to keep reading through at least one volume, if not both, in a single session. Are these airs good? You can never have too much Jenkins.

John Moran
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Players intermediate and up are welcome!

¹ Andrew Ashbee: *The Harmonious Music of John Jenkins, Vol. 2: Suites, Airs and Vocal Music*. Toccata Press, 2020. p. 105.