

Introduction

The present Sonata in A Minor for two violas da gamba and basso continuo is housed in the library of Durham Cathedral (GB-DRc) under the shelf number **D.4 No 9**. The manuscript anthology D.4 belonged to Philip Falle, a canon of Durham Cathedral, who bequeathed it to the library in 1722 along with other manuscripts. The manuscript for the most part contains viol music from the European continent.¹ There are a number of indications – for example, the spelling of “Young” as “Joung,” and of “Jenkins” as “Jenckins” – that the copyist was not an Englishman.

In D.4, our sonata is preserved in the form of three individual parts that are simply titled “9 Sonata.” At the end of each of the three parts is found the annotation “G. Schüts.” As a consequence of this annotation, the sonata has been attributed in musicological literature to the German composer, viol and cornetto player Gabriel Schütz. Schütz was born in Lübeck in 1633 and received his musical training from the local town musician Nicolaus Bleyer. He learned English viol technique from Thomas Simpson and William Brade, who were both active in Northern Germany. At the age of twenty-two he set off for Italy, but only got as far as Nuremberg, where his virtuoso viol and cornetto playing so impressed the local dignitaries that he was persuaded to stay. Mattheson reported about his appearance in Nuremberg, “where he performed in such a manner on the viola da gamba and on the cornetto that one considered him at that time to be one of the best masters in the Holy Roman Empire.”² And he actually did remain in Nuremberg for the rest of his life in spite of various other job offers. In 1666 he was appointed town musician. Among his pupils were the composer Johann Philipp Krieger and the viol player Konrad Höffler. Schütz died in Nuremberg in 1710.

The few surviving works by Gabriel Schütz are rather simple in terms of technique, which in a way appears to contradict his much praised virtuosity as a player. This sonata, which in its structure is reminiscent of the compositions by Nicolai, nevertheless represents a gratifying addition to the German repertoire for two viols. Lively, quick sections alternate with calm passages over a constant meter. As a rule, new themes are first introduced by each player individually before a synthesis is arrived at. The compass of the six-string bass viol is exploited quite well by the two melody parts. Chords are dispensed with.

Our edition has been prepared for practical use, but follows the source as closely as possible. However, we only had a relatively poor copy of the source at our disposal, so that many details could only be determined from the context. This is particularly true of the figuring in the bass part.

We would like to thank Angela Koppenwallner for the reconstruction of the figuring and for the continuo realization, and Howard Weiner for the translation of this introduction.

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¹ To be found there are also the well-known pieces for three viols by the Stuttgart composer Johann Michael Nicolai. See e.g. Johann Michael Nicolai, *Sonata in C Major*, eds. G. and L. von Zadow (Heidelberg: Guntersberg, 2003, G041).

² Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte* (Hamburg, 1740), 321.