

Introduction

The German composer, organist, and violinist Dietrich Becker was born in 1623 in Hamburg. He began his musical career in 1642 as organist of the Schlosskirche in Ahrensburg. In 1654 and 1655 he was employed as a violinist in the chapel of Count Magnus de la Gardie in Stockholm, subsequently in the court chapel of Duke Christian Ludwig in Celle. In 1662 he left Celle – temporarily at first – to continue studies in Lübeck and Hamburg. However, he did not return to Celle, but was rather entered that same year as “musician” in the list of Hamburg citizens. Soon thereafter he is documented as solo violinist of the Hamburg town band. In 1667 he was appointed leader of the town band and thus successor to Johann Schop the Elder. In 1674 he additionally assumed a “small canonry” at the cathedral, for which he had to supply a piece of figural music each quarter year. Becker died in Hamburg, highly respected, but poor, in 1679.

Dietrich Becker was one of Northern Germany’s most famous violinists in the second half of the seventeenth century. Many instrumental and vocal works by him have been preserved, for example, the *Musicalische Frühlings-Früchte* (“Musical Spring Fruits”), which were published in Hamburg in 1688 (sonatas for three to five instruments and basso continuo), and the sacred concerto *Schaff in mir Gott ein reines Herz*.¹ Among viola da gambists, his Sonata in D Major for violin, viola da gamba, and basso continuo is well known.²

There are two sources for the present Sonata in A Major:

Q1

GB-Lbl³ Add. MS 64965, no. 4, fols. 13–17. *Sonata Del Sig^r Becker*. The manuscript is a score with the parts *Violino*, *Viola*, and *Basso*. “Viola” most certainly means “viola da gamba,” since there are many low passages that cannot be played on the viola. Add. MS 64965 is a composite manuscript with sixteen individual works from the mid eighteenth century.

Q2

GB-Ob⁴ Mus. Sch. C.78 a–c *Sonatas for 2 Bass Violls With a Thorow Bass for y^e Harpsicord or Bass violl Composed by Benjamin Hely*. The manuscript consists of three individual partbooks that contain seven sonatas, of which the first six are indeed by Hely.⁵ The seventh sonata, however, is a copyist manuscript in another hand and does not fit to the first six. Information concerning the composer and instrumentation is lacking. A comparison with Q1 shows that it is in fact the Sonata in A Major by Becker.

Source Q1 served as the primary source of our edition, since in contrast to Q2 it hardly displays any errors. The two sources are otherwise only slightly different.

Our edition follows source Q1 as closely as possible. Editorial changes are indicated by dashed lines or parentheses. All other corrections are described in footnotes in the score. The sketchy bass figures have not been supplemented. However, in cases of doubt, our continuo realization provides information.

Becker numbered among the most important North-German instrumental composers of the second half of the seventeenth century. His works stand in the tradition of Weckmann, Reincken, and Buxtehude. Characteristic of Becker are the passages in which the viola da gamba and bass play together and the concertante sections with solos for the individual instruments with a concluding tutti.

The present sonata has apparently remained unnoticed until now and is lacking in all encyclopedias and catalogues accessible to us, with the exception of RISM. This is certainly due to the fact that the work is incorrectly specified in both sources. We are therefore pleased to present this important sonata to the public for the first time in this edition.

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¹ Dietrich Becker, *Schaff in mir Gott ein reines Herz – Geistliches Konzert für Alt, 2 Violinen, 2 Violen da Gamba, Violone und B.c.*, ed. H. Gröger (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2007), G136.

² Dietrich Becker, *Sonata à 2. Violino & Violadagamba*, ed. G. and L. v. Zadow (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2005), G064 and G502.

³ The British Library, London.

⁴ University of Oxford, Bodleian Libraries.

⁵ Benjamin Hely, *Sechs Sonaten für drei Violen da Gamba oder zwei Violen da Gamba und Basso continuo*, ed. G. and L. v. Zadow (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2017), G317 and G318.