

Introduction

Johann Michael Nicolai was born in 1629 in Thüringen, and it is assumed that he received his good music education there. He played several instruments including the violone, and was a member of the prestigious ensemble of the Count of Sachsen-Lauenburg. From 1655 until his death in 1685 he was an “instrumentalist” in the Stuttgart royal orchestra, where his duties included teaching the choirboys.

He wrote several sacred works, for example *12 Geistliche Harmonien* for three voices, two violins and basso continuo (print, Frankfurt 1669). He also wrote several instrumental compositions in which the viola da gamba mostly plays an important role, for example the 12 Sonatas in the collection *Erster Theil instrumentalischer Sachen* for two violins, viola da gamba/bassoon and basso continuo (print, Augsburg 1675).

Five trio sonatas by Nicolai for the then popular instrumentation of violin, viola da gamba and basso continuo are known: two are in the collection *Partiturbuch Ludwig* in Wolfenbüttel,¹ and two in the Düben collection in Uppsala.² The manuscript of the fifth sonata is held in the Durham Cathedral Library, where Nicolai’s well-known sonatas for two and three gambas are also found.³ This first edition presents this fifth sonata.

The RISM shelfmark of the manuscript is **GB-DRc MS D2/1–3**. It comprises three individual parts, each with the title “Sonata 14. a. 2. violi: et viola.” The tessitura of the second voice makes it clear that “viola” means “viola da gamba.” This is reinforced by the inscription in bar 57 of the bass

part: “violdig: Solo.” The composer is given on the gamba part as “N3c4l13,” which means “Nicolai” when decoded.⁴ The bass part is figured.

We have transferred the notation into the modern convention as precisely as possible. The original clefs are largely retained, but in the gamba part the changes between bass and alto clef are displaced in some places, to accord better with the flow of the music. The occasional alto clef in the bass part has been replaced by bass or treble clef. In the original, most bar lines are omitted, and we have inserted these. We have adapted the use of accidentals to the modern convention, that is they now apply for the rest of the bar. Editorial accidentals which differ from the original are placed in brackets. The sonata is in G minor, but is notated with only one flat, which was customary at the time, and we have retained this. The manuscript is not without mistakes. Editorial additions are identified as usual (slurs dotted, additions in brackets), and corrections of notes are listed in the Critical Commentary.

As in many trio sonatas with gamba in this period, the gamba does not play a continuous independent contrapuntal voice, but rather supports the bass at times. It is therefore probably better to play the bass part on a harpsichord or other chordal instrument rather than with a second bass viol. Our realisation of the figured bass may be useful for this purpose.

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¹ *Partiturbuch Ludwig*, also called *Gothaer Liederbuch*, D-W Cod. Guelf. 34.7 Aug 2°, Nr. 35 and 36.

² S-Uu Instr. mus. i hs. 5:6a and 5:6b.

³ Johann Michael Nicolai, *Sonate C-Dur für 3 Bassgamben und B.c.* (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2003), G041 – Johann Michael Nicolai, *Sonate A-Moll und Suite D-Moll für 2 Bassgamben und B.c.* (Hei-

delberg: Güntersberg, 2004), G047 – Johann Michael Nicolai, *Sonata A-Moll und Sonata D-Dur für drei Violon da Gamba* (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2018), G326.

⁴ The figures stand for the vowels a, e, i, o, u in this order. On the violin part is written „N3c4l14“, where the last figure probably is certainly a copyist’s error. The bass part contains no such inscription.