

Johann Gottfried Graun, Quartet in G minor for two violins, viola da gamba or viola, and basso continuo (GraunWV Av:XIV:10)

ed. Michael O'Loghlin and Günter von Zadow. Edition Güntersberg, G273, 2015, ISMN 979-0-50174-273-8. Score and parts, €19.80.

The highly mannered style of the Berlin School might be an acquired taste, but it is also eminently suited to the characteristics of the viola da gamba. What could better convey the aesthetic of the *empfindsamer Stil*, or sensitive style, than the supple, plangent quality of the voice of the viol? It is therefore no surprise that this instrument, which might have been fading into the background in some places, still held a place of prominence at the courts of Frederick II, the "Great," and his gamba-playing nephew who would eventually be crowned Friedrich Wilhelm II. The unspoken corollary is that much of the music of the *galant* style only fully comes to life with the sounds and techniques of the instruments of the period.

The Quartet in G minor for viola da gamba, two violins, and basso continuo by Johann Gottlieb Graun (1702/3-1771) brings together many of the finest distinguishing qualities of the Berlin School. It is a late example of a Baroque concertante quartet, essentially a piece for three melody instruments and basso continuo, as opposed to the burgeoning string quartet. Graun was a virtuoso violinist and royal concertmaster at the court of Frederick the Great, where he worked for over two decades with the gamba virtuoso Ludwig Christian Hesse. Both men were among the elite group of musicians who performed privately before the king in his nightly concerts. One can imagine the impression made by this quartet in such a rarified atmosphere of knowledgeable listeners, who could savor each chromatic appoggiatura and rightly appreciate the technical finesse required to play successions of double stops in thirds on the viol without any hint of effort.

Indeed, this quartet must have achieved a measure of popularity, for it survives in no fewer than seven manuscript copies, all listed and described in Michael O'Loghlin's expert introduction to this edition. Two of the seven extant copies employ an obbligato viola da gamba for the third part, while the remaining five copies arrange this part for viola, an indication that gamba players of this caliber were in short supply. As is the case with most of Graun's chamber music, no autograph survives, so the editors have chosen as their primary source the set of parts in the hand of Ludwig Christian Hesse now housed in the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek in Darmstadt. A scan of this manuscript version, available online through IMSLP, makes for easy comparison with the edition. While Hesse's copy notates the viol part in octavated treble clef, a practice common at the time in Northern Germany and England, Güntersberg

has opted to follow the more common modern practice with the viol part in alto clef. As we have come to expect from Güntersberg, the editors faithfully reproduce the details of Hesse's copy, including useful fingerings and ornament signs. The editing is of a very high quality—I discovered just one instance of a natural sign inadvertently missing from the viol part (third movement, m.125).

This edition also includes a separate part for the viola version of the third voice in the quartet, based on the viola line in the anonymous manuscript copy of the score now in Berlin, the source in which the editors believe the viola part best matches the viol part in Hesse's copy. Because of simplifications with regard to double stops that occur in the viola part, it is clear that the viol was the instrument originally intended for this part.

From this quartet and other music written for Hesse, including various concertos by the Graun brothers, it is clear that he had attained an uncanny level of facility in double stops, particularly in playing parallel thirds and sixths, a suave effect put to frequent use in this music. While these technical demands might frighten some players, it is worth noting that, once learned, the technique can be applied in playing a large body of Berlin-school music, much of which has already been published by Güntersberg. Although this style of gamba music is not as well known as that of France or England, it is worth the effort to learn such music that is every bit as charming as the more familiar repertoire, and presents another idiomatic facet of the highly versatile viola da gamba.

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