

Benjamin Hely

A Sett of Lessons: one-part and two-part pieces for the Viola da Gamba Lesson

Ed. Günter von Zadow and Leonore von Zadow-Reichling, with a reconstruction by Wolfgang Kostujak
Edition Güntersberg G319

Little is known about Benjamin Hely, who was active as a viol player in London at the end of the 17th century. He died in 1699. His surviving compositions are listed in the *VdGS Index*: nine airs for solo bass viol, six duets for two bass viols, and six (or possibly seven) sonatas for two viols with continuo. The present edition includes all the solos and duets, but not the pieces with continuo.

The solo airs survive in two sources: a printed book, *The Compleat Violist*¹ (date given as 1699 in the edition, and c.1700 in the *Index*), and a manuscript, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MU MS 641. The editors use *The Compleat Violist* for their primary source of the first eight airs, and Cfm 641 for the ninth air, which survives solely in that manuscript. The first four airs – Almand², Courant, Saraband, Jigg – form a Suite in A minor, and conveniently appear as one opening in the edition. The other five movements form a suite in A major. The music is tuneful, idiomatic for the viol, pleasant on the ear, and falls well under the hand. There is some double-stopping and there are occasional three- or four-note chords; other harmonies are created by broken chords. The editors faithfully reproduce two kinds of ornament from the original print, although they do not give any indication as to how they should be interpreted. In the introduction to *The Compleat Violist* they are called shakes (trills) and beats (lower mordents). The editors provide facsimiles of the Almand from the two extant sources.

The six duets for two bass viols are taken from the unique source, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MU MS 634. All are in F major, and could be played as a suite. They are easier to play than the solos, with very little double-stopping. Both viols have the alto clef for all but a few notes, and Bass 1 occasionally goes above the frets to c". The editors describe the duets in their Introduction (where their English translation quaintly maintains German word-order): 'The simpler duo movements follow an at that time rather old-fashioned contrapuntal pattern... They are certainly welcome exercises for viol pupils.' There is an

¹ *The Compleat Violist* may be downloaded in its entirety free at <https://www.loc.gov/item/31004472/>

² There is a nice performance of the Almand on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiEIDw1ZTAU>

unfortunate error in the original manuscript: Bass 1 of the Saraband was copied a second time instead of Bass 2. The editors provide a choice of two substitute parts composed by Wolfgang Kostujak. The music of this edition is clearly laid out, easy to read, and with no page-turns within a movement. Editorial changes are given as footnotes. The duets are presented as a two-part score, and a separate copy is provided.

Stewart McCoy