Introduction

Concertmaster of Frederick the Great’s illustrious court orchestra in Berlin, Johann Gottlieb Graun was one of the most significant of all eighteenth-century composers for the viola da gamba. Like many of the Berlin court composers, Graun came from Saxony. He was educated at the Kreuzschule in Dresden and studied violin under the Dresden concertmaster Pisendel. In the early decades of the century the Dresden orchestra was one of the finest in Europe, and was known for its discipline and uniform bowing under Pisendel’s direction. Graun brought this attitude to Berlin, and it can perhaps be seen in the unusually precise dynamic indi-
cations which are found in the music of Graun and his colleagues. Early in his career Graun developed a fiery and virtuosic style of violin writing, which he carried over into the music he later wrote in Berlin for Frederick’s resident gamba player, Ludwig Christian Hesse (1716–1772). In 1766, J. A. Hiller said of Hesse: “The skill, attractiveness and fire in performance which our Mr. Hesse possesses to such a high degree make him, in our time, incontestably the greatest gambist in Europe.”

Graun wrote at least 24 works involving the viola da gamba, often in a soloistic capacity. They include solo concertos, group concertos, solo and ensemble sonatas, and cantatas. However, this cembalo obbligato sonata is not an original gamba work, but rather an arrangement by Hesse of an existing trio for two violins and basso continuo. Conversions from the trio to the obbligato sonata were frequently made, but this is the only one in the hand of Hesse. As is usually the case, the first violin part is taken by the harpsichordist’s right hand; the gamba plays the second violin part notated in treble clef at the original pitch but sounding an octave lower; and the left hand plays the original bass line. This means that the harpsichordist is only able to use the right hand to realize bass figures where the original first violin is silent, and Hesse has provided figures only in those places.

This edition is based entirely on S1, Hesse’s arrangement, the other three surviving sources having been used for reference and comparison only (the sources are listed below). S1 has a high level of internal consistency, and does not deviate greatly from the other sources apart from the instrumentation. The major variations relate to Hesse’s adaptations of the sonata for its new instrumentation: given that the basic pitch of the gamba is an octave below that of the violin, he has transposed the bass down an octave in a couple of passages to prevent the two parts crossing. In other places he has transposed the gamba back up an octave, either for the same reason or because he preferred the higher register. Hesse is also responsible for all of the chords and doublestops found in the gamba part: although Graun was a famed virtuoso who used very difficult chords in some of his other violin music, he appears not to have used any in the violin variant of this work. Hesse has been quite reticent in adding chords to the harpsichord right hand. The only extended passage where he has done this is the opening statement of the theme in the first movement. This happens to be the only extended solo passage for harpsichord, since in the other two movements the gamba introduces the theme. There are also a few minor differences between the sources in phrasing, dynamics and ornamentation.

As in many sonatas of the Berlin School composers, the slow movement is placed as the first of the three movements. This system may have been invented by G. B. Somis (see Edition Güntersberg “Königliche Gambenduos” G033) and was also used by Tartini, who is thought to have been a teacher of Graun. It lays emphasis on the slow movement, which no longer has the character of an intermezzo or (in the case of a four-movement sonata) of a short prelude to a contrapuntal Allegro. The Berlin opening slow movements are weighty pieces in binary form, but without repeated sections. Many of them are strongly emotional showpieces of Empfindsamkeit, the North German “sensitive” style. With its remarkable tempo marking, Adagio e mesto, its falling main theme and sighing motives, this movement is surely one of those. It is interesting that of the other sources, only S4 has this tempo marking for the slow movement; in S2 it is marked Andante, and S3 has no tempo marking for the movement. However, it is unlikely that Hesse used S4 as a source for his arrangement: in S4, the first two movements are reversed. This more conventional placement of the slow movement in the middle of the sonata suggests that S4 is a later copy, made to suit a more modern taste. Hesse probably used a fifth source, now lost: since Hesse and Graun worked closely together in the Berlin ensemble for over 20 years, this source is very likely to have been Graun’s autograph.

A characteristic of the North German empfindsamer Stil is the frequent and effective use of expressive appoggiaturas. These are normally dissonant and can either be written as small “grace notes” or as full-sized notes, as in bar 2 of the first movement. Interpretation of the first category of appoggiatura can sometimes be problematic. Here, C. P. E. Bach’s rule is relevant to the music of his Berlin colleagues: irrespective of its written value, the appoggiatura should be played on the beat, and take half the value of the main note before which it stands. If the main note is dotted, the appoggiatura takes two-thirds of its value. This is important

3 Or in one source, for flute, violin and continuo. See below.
4 Hesse is, however, responsible for a vast output of gamba arrangements and copies of other forms: operas, motets, concertos and other sonata genres.
in places such as bar 43 of the third movement, where the rhythmic notation is different between the upper parts, but the performance is the same. Bach also instructs that all *appoggiaturas* are slurred to the following main note, whether this is indicated or not.¹

Hesse has carefully notated dynamics, using the terms *for*, *pia* and *pp*. We have replaced the first two by the modern conventional signs *f* and *p*. Editorial dynamics, based on reference to the other sources, are placed in square brackets. All slurs have been taken unchanged from S1. There are several places where performers may wish to add slurs, for example on the many pairs of semiquavers in the last movement. The gamba fingerings in bars 6 and 8 of the third movement are from Hesse.

**The Sources**


S2 D B KHM 1930. *Trio XXXIII.* / a / *Violino I. / Violino II. / e / Basso / di Graun*.

S3 D B AmB 240/7. *Trio*.


Brisbane, Australia, January 2010
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¹ Bach, *Versuch*, Part 1, p. 64.