

Introduction

Johann Michael Nicolai was born in 1629 in Thuringia, and it is assumed that he received his musical training there. He played a number of instruments, including the violone, and became a member of the prestigious court chapel of the Count of Saxon-Lauenburg. From 1665 until his death in 1685, he was “instrumentalist” in the Stuttgart court orchestra, whereby his responsibilities included the instruction of the choirboys.

Nicolai wrote many sacred works, for example, the 12 *Geistliche Harmonien* for three voices, two violins, and b.c. (printed in Frankfurt, 1669). Moreover, he composed a number of instrumental compositions in most of which the viola da gamba played an important role, for example the twelve sonatas in the *Erster Theil instrumentalischer Sachen* for two violins, viola da gamba/bassoon, and b.c. (printed in Augsburg, 1675), and several trio sonatas for violin, viola da gamba, and b.c.¹

The present sonatas for three violas da gamba are found in the manuscript anthology *D10* in the library of Durham Cathedral, together with similar works by Nicolai that we published previously.² *D10* additionally includes numerous instrumental works for viola da gamba by composers such as Butler, Jenkins, Norcombe, Steffkin, Webster, and Young. *D10* is part of an extensive music collection that Philip Falle (1656–1742) acquired during his travels through Europe. Falle was chaplain to William III, and later became canon of Durham Cathedral. In 1722 he bequeathed his collection to the library of the cathedral.³

Our edition is based on the following sources:

Q1a

GB-DRc⁴ D10, pp. 20–28.

Sonata â 3 Viol da gamba, Authore Michael Nicolaj. This is the **Sonata in A minor**. The manuscript is a score in three parts designated *Viola Ima*, *Viola 2da*, and *Viola 3ta*. The scribe is not known.

Q1b

GB-DRc D10, pp. 29–33.

Sonata â 3 Violdagamba, Aúthore Michael Nicolay. This is the **Sonata in D major**. The manuscript is a three-part score. The part designations are taken from manuscript Q1a. Both Q1a and Q1b are in the same hand.

Q2

GB Lbl⁵ Add Ms 31430.

This is an omnibus manuscript that contains, among other things, fantasias and sonatas for three bass violins attributed to John Jenkins. There are two partbooks only; the partbook with the first voice has not survived. In addition to several other pieces, found in the manuscript are the first seventy-one measures of the Sonata in A minor from manuscript Q1a. The attribution to Jenkins is not associated with these seventy-one measures, but rather found elsewhere in the manuscript. There is hardly a doubt that the Sonata in Q1a is by Johann Michael Nicolai, especially in view of the attribution to him of the similar sonata in Q1b.

Since source Q2 is incomplete in two respects, we consider source Q1 from Durham to be our primary source. Our transcription into modern notation has been done as precisely as possible. Alto, tenor, and bass clefs appear in the manuscript; in contrast, we use only alto and bass clefs. We have modernized the placement of the accidentals, i.e., our accidentals are valid for the respective whole measure. In the original, the Sonata in D major is notated with only one sharp; in our edition, however, with two sharps as is usual today.

The manuscript contains an unusually large number of scribal errors: notes are shifted upward or downward, accidentals and barlines are lacking, repeat signs are contradictory, clef changes are placed incorrectly, and so on. However, as a rule it is possible to determine what is intended from the context, from sequences, and from the harmonies. We have undertaken the corresponding corrections in order to produce a practicable edition. In many

¹ See, for example, Johann Michael Nicolai, *Sonata 14 – Sonata G-Moll für Violine, Viola da Gamba und Basso continuo*, ed. G. and L. v. Zadow (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2018), G327.

² Johann Michael Nicolai, *Sonate C-Dur für 3 Violen da Gamba und Basso continuo*, ed. G. and L. v. Zadow (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2003), G041; as well as Johann Michael Nicolai (attributed), *Sonate*

A-Moll und Suite D-Moll für 2 Violen da Gamba und Basso continuo, ed. G. and L. v. Zadow (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2004), G047.

³ Brian Crosby, *A Catalogue of Durham Cathedral Music Manuscripts* (Oxford 1986) pp. 54 and 79.

⁴ Durham Cathedral Library.

⁵ The British Library, London.

cases, our corrections have also been confirmed by the fragmentary source Q2. Since a Critical Report would have been rather extensive, we include in our edition complete facsimiles of sources Q1a and Q1b. Moreover, we have marked every altered note in our score with an asterisk (*), even if it is merely the accidental that has been changed or added. (These asterisks are not in the individual parts.) In this way, all of our corrections are transparent, making possible diverging decisions.

These sonatas are relatively well-known among viola da gamba players, since they appeared in a modern edition already in 1981.⁶ Even if this commendable edition no longer meets all of today's requirements, it was a great help to us for our corrections. Because the respective editor's own opinions naturally inform such corrections, it is understandable that the two editions differ in many details.

According to the original title, these sonatas were intended for three violas da gamba, and in most cases they will undoubtedly also be played in this way. However, in the manuscript there are also a few figures in the bass part. This indicates that an execution of the bass with an (additional) chordal

instrument (organ, harpsichord, theorbo) was also intended. In the abovementioned C major Sonata, which is found immediately before the present sonata in the same manuscript, this is expressly required, for the score displays an additional bass staff designated *Organo*.

Like many German composers, Nicolai was familiar with the various national styles in the second half of the seventeenth century. Thus we find in these sonatas Italian (introduction and fugue at the beginning of both sonatas), French (courantes), and English elements (fast sarabande in the Sonata in D major). What is special, however, is the pleasant, sonorous, and harmonically rich sound of the three bass instruments.

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Translation: Howard Weiner

⁶ Johann Michael Nicolai, *Sonata in D major & Sonata in A minor for three bass viols and continuo*, ed. Richard Maunder (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1981).