

secondary evidence of the specific instruments played by the old masters, or even those that were in common use at various periods and places. Modern makers would do well to go beyond reproducing surviving instruments and seek information from iconographical and literary sources. In a word, craftsmen should also be scholars.

A review of such a volume of 19 papers covering such a wide range of topics can only offer a *tour d'horizon*. The symposium's organization is to be commended on bringing out the proceedings in well edited and excellent printed form so promptly. So often years elapse before this comes to pass. The late summer of 2003 will see a sixth symposium at Magnano. Those clavichord enthusiasts who are able will surely wish to attend. Those who cannot may await publication of the proceedings. They, too, will be well served.

## Michael Fleming

### The Italian viol lives

*The Italian viola da gamba: Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Italian Viola da Gamba, Magnano, Italy, 29 April – 1 May 2000*, ed. Susan Orlando (Solignac/Turin: Edition Ensemble Baroque de Limoges/Edizioni Angolo Manzoni, 2002), €45

New books about viols are rare, especially those devoted to just one aspect of them, so this collection of articles about a neglected corner of the viol field is especially welcome. The contents comprise the papers read at a conference organized by Christoph Coin and Susan Orlando in Magnano, in spring 2000, and therefore reflect the interests of participants rather than a systematic survey. As a result, the work is not of a uniformly high standard, but its variety is a strength. It demonstrates that many viol topics are under active investigation, and it frequently reminds us how misinformed are those who rely unquestioningly on received opinion. The broad range of papers address both the instruments themselves and their use in Italy. While there is no musicological discussion of repertory, there is a passionate and well-argued plea from Paolo Pandolfo, one of today's leading violists, for the reinstatement of improvisation as a major component of public and private music-making.

Within the last half century a new view has been advanced that identifies the origin and early development of viols in Spain and Italy at the end of the 15th century. This was finely described in Ian Woodfield's landmark book *The early history of the viol* (1984). The first article in *The Italian viol* is by Renato Meucci, who translated Woodfield's book into Italian, and here adds to the important strand of iconographical evidence presented therein. However, several articles share with a large proportion of organological writing a disappointing vagueness and/or lack of supporting evidence when interpreting images, especially for comments concerning instruments' structure. For example, 'Adding an arched bridge, whose increased pressure on the soundboard required various types of reinforcements, soon modified the original construction of the viols' (p.29). The reader does not know whether to disagree with the author (because it is an increase in height, not arching, that increases pressure on the belly), or to sympathize with him about the obscuration of his precise and meaningful thought. Some such problems may be attributed to infelicities of translation, a common problem in organology, especially where terminology is itself an issue. In this case, confidence is already undermined by a preceding comment about the same painting that interprets the three musicians as comprising a consort of viols, although the instruments are clearly all the same size. This is said to be 'evidence that music based on a single melodic line was already in use at that time' (p.28). It is difficult to know what to make of this.

Several papers present important evidence that the viol did not fall almost completely out of favour in Italy by the early 17th century, as is widely believed. Viols are shown to be found in later inventories, they are described in theoretical works, and patrons, composers and players are shown to have paid attention to them. A paper by T. G. MacCracken provides the most up-to-date listing of Italian viols, drawn from his larger project of documenting all antique viols. Two papers address 'violin-shaped' instruments (i.e. with four pointed corners, and the top ribs joining the neck at a right angle), encouraging us to view them not as weird hybrids but as one of many standard viol forms, if 'standard viol form' is not an oxymoron. Considered all together, these papers provide ample evidence to demand a revision of established views of the nature of Italian viols and their prominence in Italy, and indeed elsewhere.

Among other papers discussing viols as instruments is another airing of K. Moens's deep mistrust of many instruments in museum collections which purport to be

mid-16th-century viols by members of the Venetian Ciciliano family and others. This mistrust rests on a frankly unconvincing superimposition of the shape of the viol on that of a bass violin, which is claimed to show that instruments of this shape represent a recycling of another species to satisfy antiquarian or other demands. The claim is supported by dendrochronological evidence, but this cannot provide more than a *terminus post quem*, so when the date found post-dates the claimed time of manufacture, it cannot support either position (although there are some cases where dendrochronological evidence does show clearly that an instrument cannot have been made at the date ascribed to it). Incomplete and/or inconsistent provenance documentation is a further issue that calls for explanation, but it is something that these old viols have in common with almost all others. Moens certainly provides enough evidence to make a substantial case, but not enough to move this reviewer from a default position of profound mistrust and caution about putative antique viols to one of outright rejection. Other people's examinations of Ciciliano viols are described in other papers given here. These, unsurprisingly, confirm Moens's views in some respects, but do not demand a wholesale rejection of the instruments as historical documents that are revealing about what they claim to be. Even so, Moens's closing statement that 'a study of extant early viols often tells us more about the nineteenth century than about the sixteenth century' is true, and much of the 21st century may pass before we can outgrow the errors made in the 20th. No doubt our own aspirations towards a complete, objective, accurate analysis and understanding of extant old instruments will appear flawed and inadequate in due course, but attending to issues such as those raised in *The Italian viol* could help us to avoid some errors of carelessness and superficiality. Altogether, this is a very useful and welcome work.

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OUR CONGRATULATIONS to Teresa M. Gialdrone and Agostino Ziino, whose Petrucci article in the November 2001 issue of *Early music* has received the Richard S. Hill Award from the Music Library Association for 'the best article on music librarianship or article of a music-bibliographic nature published in 2001'.

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Graham Dixon

## Monteverdi at San Marco

Linda Maria Koldau, *Die venezianische Kirchenmusik von Claudio Monteverdi* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2001), £33.50

If there had been business schools in 17th-century Italy, Monteverdi's church music would have made a great case study for the marketing course. No wonder the Marian Vespers of 1610 proved to be the focus of attention over the centuries. It is clear from the label what is being presented; the assembled items form a coherent whole; and the elements are delivered in a single packaging; you don't need to go out and purchase accessories to make it work well. Now those of us who have indulged in debate about the 1610 collection know that it is not really so simple; however, initial perceptions are important, and with the case of the Mantuan collection relatively straightforward. The same cannot be said of the church music that Monteverdi published while active as *maestro di cappella* at San Marco in Venice. The title of the first—*Selva morale e spirituale* (1641)—is scarcely clear: the pieces seem at first sight to be a confusing pot-pourri of liturgical music, apart from the spiritual madrigals at the opening, which add to the problem of understanding a primarily liturgical volume. At least with the 1610 volume, you can open it and perform it from beginning to end, and give the impression that Vespers was performed like that in Monteverdi's time—even if it never actually was.

It is a pity that the church music of the Venetian period has been largely in the shadow of the 1610 collection. After all, Monteverdi was primarily working in a religious context during some 30 years in Venice, yet it is his secular music from this time—madrigals and operas—which have primarily attracted the attention of performers and scholars. From his earliest years he was involved with church music, publishing a modest volume of motets in 1582 when he was still in his teens. The stylistic evidence is that some real involvement continued, since the developing dramatic style of his secular compositions is also applied to his church music, in line with the *Seicento* tendency to stimulate the emotions in contemplating the sacred sphere. Such trends can also be seen in the flowering of extra-liturgical observances such as devotions to particular saints, processions and novenas, which were performed with considerable affective intensity. We know nothing of Monteverdi's own spirituality, though his position and his