

RESEARCH REPORT: VIOL SYMPOSIUM AT KLOSTER MICHAELSTEIN

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In the spring of 2000, two research conferences devoted entirely or largely to the viol took place in quick succession in Italy and Scotland, as I reported in these pages later that year.¹ During the following decade the only comparable gathering, so far as I know, was a symposium held in 2002 as part of that year's *Tage Alter Musik* festival in Herne (Germany).² Meanwhile, since 1980 a small non-profit organization in the former East Germany has been presenting an annual series of scholarly gatherings, each one devoted to a different type of musical instrument. After focusing on nearly every other kind of wind, string, and keyboard instrument, in 2010 they decided to turn their attention to the viol, resulting in an event entitled "Repertoire, Instruments, and Construction of the Viols."

The conference was held from November 19 to 21 at the headquarters of the sponsoring organization, the Kloster Michaelstein Foundation, which is located in a former Cistercian monastery near the town of Blankenburg, in the Harz Mountains region, about halfway between Hanover and Leipzig. Participants were both housed and fed within the abbey complex of half a dozen nicely renovated buildings, an arrangement that was not only effi-

¹Thomas G. MacCracken, "Research Report: Conferences in Magnano and Edinburgh," *JVdGSA* 37 (2000): 68–83. A dozen papers from the former event, all in English, were subsequently published in Susan Orlando, ed., *The Italian Viola da Gamba* (Solignac: Edition Ensemble Baroque de Limoges; Turin: Edizioni Angolo Manzoni, 2002); see the review by Herbert W. Myers in *JVdGSA* 41 (2004): 69–74.

²These papers were also published, several years after the event itself, in Christian Ahrens and Gregor Klinke, eds., *Viola da gamba und Viola da braccio: Symposium im Rahmen der 27. Tage Alter Musik in Herne 2002* (Munich and Salzburg: Musikverlag Katzschler, 2006). Despite the title, three-quarters of the articles concern viols and their music, including a number of interesting and important contributions by well-known researchers, builders, and performers; however, only two of the nineteen are in English.

cient but also provided welcome opportunities for socializing between the officially scheduled activities. These included, in addition to morning and afternoon paper sessions, an extended lecture-recital on the first evening and on Saturday a well-attended public concert offering a varied assortment of works featuring the viol, performed by Artist-in-Residence Paolo Pandolfo, several of his former students, and some of the conference speakers. In fact, the symposium itself was the culmination of a year-long group of events presented by Kloster Michaelstein under Pandolfo's direction, beginning with a midwinter recital and continuing with a springtime masterclass weekend in collaboration with Wieland Kuijken and a Summer Early Music Academy for strings both bowed and plucked.

Nearly half of the two dozen speakers—and most of the approximately 50 other participants—hailed from Germany itself, with the rest coming from elsewhere in Europe, along with a handful from the U.K. and the United States. A majority of the papers presented during the three-day weekend concerned various aspects of the viol's repertoire, while the remainder dealt with the instrument itself, either as physical object or social phenomenon. Pandolfo's opening remarks on "The Spirit of the Viol" ranged the most widely, touching on its historical origins and evolution, its technical versatility as both a melody and a chordal instrument, and the place of improvisation in its repertoire. Speaking for the most part extemporaneously, he offered some reflections on the viol's revival in the twentieth century, which as he pointed out has progressed through four main generations of players, exemplified respectively by August Wenzinger, Wieland Kuijken and Jordi Savall, Pandolfo himself and his contemporaries, and finally their students now emerging as young professionals. After emphasizing the importance of learning both from the historical sources and from interaction with the instrument itself, he concluded by asserting that "the viola da gamba was and is the perfect instrument, on which you can do everything," and that it does indeed have something worthwhile to say to our modern world.

Later that morning, in her talk on "Historical and Modern Playing Technique on the Viol," Annette Otterstedt (widely known as the author of *The Viol: History of an Instrument*, published by

Bärenreiter in 2002) returned to one of Pandolfo's points, noting that early revival players were mostly cellists with limited access to original source material, some of whom wrongly regarded the viol as an easy instrument. Yet even today certain gambists fail to heed the technical advice of historical writers, as she creatively demonstrated by contrasting projected excerpts from their treatises with a series of images and clips taken from videos currently available on YouTube, though with the players' faces cropped out to preserve their anonymity.

Tina Chancey's presentation on "The Pardessus de Viole: Gender and the Politics of Virtuosity" combined speaking and playing as she explored some of the implications of Barthélémy de Caix's duets for two *pardessus de viole*, which she has both recorded (with Catharina Meints, Dorian DIS-80150) and written about in the 1996 and 1997 volumes of this journal. Two questions in particular caught her attention initially: why are these pieces technically so much more difficult than anything else written for this smallest member of the viol family, and who would have played them originally? While it is true that the *pardessus* was mainly a women's instrument in mid-eighteenth-century France, the larger issue is whether the kind of brilliant virtuosity found in these duets was considered somehow inherently masculine in that culture; Chancey concluded that it was not, being instead equally consistent with traditional modes of female accomplishment that had held sway since the Middle Ages.

Perhaps the most interesting lecture of the conference's first day was a report by the Berlin-based bow maker (and gambist) Hans Reiners on the surprising lack of documentation for Johan Schenck's activities in Düsseldorf, where he held a court appointment for many years beginning in 1696. After a thorough review of the available source material, and invoking the German proverb that "One can easily miss the keyhole by looking for it where it isn't," Reiners proposed that the celebrated gambist and composer instead served his princely employer mostly *in absentia* while actually living in Amsterdam (where all his music was published), an arrangement that conferred prestige on both parties without requiring much real work by Schenck.

After dinner Simone Eckert spoke about “The Lübeck School of Gambists Before and Around Buxtehude,” offering a survey of both players and their repertoire and concluding that there is ample evidence for the existence of such a school, with roots going back two generations before the publication of Buxtehude’s trio sonatas in the 1690s. Herself an active gambist and director of the ensemble *Hamburger Ratsmusik*, Eckert then performed a short recital of representative pieces by Thomas Baltzar, Peter Grecke, and Buxtehude, accompanied by the expatriate American harpsichordist Michael Fuerst, with whom she has recorded this repertoire on a prize-winning 2005 CD entitled *Lübecker Virtuosen* (Thorofon CTH 2474).

Three of the seven papers heard on Saturday dealt with viol makers and their surviving instruments. Klaus Martius led off with an introduction to “Viol Building in Nuremberg,” where he is currently conservator of musical instruments at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, whose collection includes about a quarter of all extant viols made in that city. The best-known and most prolific Nuremberg viol maker is Ernst Busch, active in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, about whom Martius had spoken at a previous Michaelstein conference. On this occasion, therefore, he chose to concentrate on Matthias Hummel, from whom seven basses dating from 1688 to 1714 are extant, in addition to numerous instruments of the violin and lute families. Although none of these viols still has its original neck, several have retained their pegboxes, which reveal that they originally had only five strings. (At the end of the talk one member of the audience said he would like to know how such instruments were tuned, to which Martius simply replied, “So would I.”) The same is true for one of the two known basses by Hummel’s younger contemporary, Leonhard Maussiell, whose surviving output also includes half a dozen smaller instruments that may originally have been an early type of viola d’amore without sympathetic strings, though all are presently set up as treble viols (some with five rather than six strings).

Later in the morning Friedemann Hellwig, the retired former conservator of musical instruments at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, discussed a number of “Questions about the Viols of Joachim Tielke” arising from his work on a revised and expanded

second edition of his father's pioneering 1980 monograph on that maker (Günther Hellwig, *Joachim Tielke: Ein Hamburger Lauten- und Violenmacher der Barockzeit*), which at the time of writing this report has just been published by Deutscher Kunstverlag of Berlin and Munich. Out of more than 75 surviving basses, a total exceeding that of any other viol maker of the historical period, a handful are significantly smaller than the rest, with body lengths measuring just under 60 cm. Assuming that their string lengths were in the usual proportion to body size, this suggests they were made to be tuned about a whole tone above the then-prevailing norm, for example something in the neighborhood of A466 (high organ pitch) as opposed to A415 (chamber pitch). Hellwig also provided a brief introduction to Tielke's students, imitators, and successors, notably Johann Heinrich Goldt, who was a grand-nephew of Tielke's wife Catharina Fleischer.

Changing the focus from Germany to England, after lunch I offered an introduction to half a dozen lesser-known contemporaries of Richard Meares in a paper entitled "Before Barak Norman: English Viols of the Late 17th Century and their Makers." Though surviving instruments are not plentiful and biographical information even scarcer, I was able to provide at least some details about the activity of each of these craftsmen (in alphabetical order: William Addison, Thomas Cole, Thomas Collingwood, George Miller, John Pitts, and John Shaw) and to show slides of seventeen viols—all basses—that are either signed by or attributed to them. Some of these are now in museums, but others continue to be played professionally, including three here in the United States.

As it happened, the Saturday afternoon session included two other papers delivered in English, just before and after mine, both of which explored the period of the viol's historical decline. Richard Sutcliffe, an American gambist living in Belgium (some of whose research on the *pardessus de viole* and its literature was published in the 2000 and 2001 volumes of this journal), described ways of "Retuning the Viola da Gamba in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries," considering not only the transition from six- to five-string *pardessus* but also subsequent developments such as the *viole d'Orphée* and heptachord, all of which grew out of efforts to better compete with the violin and cello. He also discussed a

number of very late pieces from German-speaking areas of Europe that call for a “viola da gamba” tuned either to a D-major chord or in fifths like a tenor violin. The English musicologist Peter Holman (also well known as director of the ensemble The Parley of Instruments) then looked at activity in England during the same time period in his “After Abel: The Viola da Gamba in Britain in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries,” successfully debunking three common myths: that Carl Friedrich Abel was the last professional gambist, that his viol was literally buried with him in 1787, and that thereafter nobody played the instrument until the 1890s. As evidence to the contrary, Holman named a series of cellist doublers and active amateurs who kept interest in the instrument alive throughout the nineteenth century, though not always playing music originally written for it. This paper expanded on a chapter toward the end of his book *Life After Death: The Viola da Gamba in Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch*, which coincidentally was published (by Boydell & Brewer) the same week as the conference and offers an interesting and in-depth survey of both professional and amateur performers throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries.

The gala concert on Saturday evening, held in the abbey’s former refectory, brought together a diverse group of rarely heard works featuring various types of viols, by eight different composers. Perhaps the least obscure of these, yet hardly mainstream repertoire, were a pair of Haydn baryton trios, in which the lead line was taken by the Italian gambist Guido Balestracci. Three other pieces on the program may be familiar to at least some readers of this report, if not to the larger world of early-music devotees, either from recordings or their own studies and performances. The concert opened with Pandolfo and his former student Balestracci playing Christoph Schaffrath’s *Duetto in D minor*, and Pandolfo alone began the second half with a suite by Carl Friedrich Abel, all of whose solo music he has recently recorded on the Glossa label. The grand finale was Handel’s cantata *Tra le fiamme*, in which the brilliant viol part was performed by the English gambist and Baroque cellist Robert Smith, another Pandolfo alumnus who was that day celebrating his thirtieth birthday.

In between came works unlikely to be familiar to more than a few specialists, including three more compositions for soprano (Caroline Pelon), obbligato viol, and strings. One of these was an aria, “Frena le belle lagrime,” that Abel wrote for a pasticcio opera called *Sifari* on which he collaborated with Baldassare Galuppi and Johann Christian Bach; here the instrumental soloist was the French gambist Amélie Chemin, still another of Pandolfo’s protégées, who elsewhere doubled on cello for the Haydn trios. The other vocal pieces were both sacred works—by Johann Baptist Schiedermayr (an organist and choral director in Linz during the early nineteenth century) and an otherwise-unknown composer named Weisnit—that Richard Sutcliffe had edited from manuscripts found at a Swiss monastery, and in which he himself played the solo part. Finally, in the middle of the program’s second half, one of Barthélémy de Caix’s difficult duets was ably rendered by American pardessus specialists Chancey and Sutcliffe.

The concluding day of the conference featured a pair of papers on the viol in Vienna in the morning, and a three-part presentation centered on the baryton in the afternoon. First, the musicologist and violinist Dagmar Glüxam described “The Juxtaposition of Viol and Violoncello at the Viennese Court,” where the former instrument was used until the early 1730s, both in mixed ensembles with violins and for obbligato lines in vocal arias, although after the arrival of Attilio Ariosti and the brothers Giovanni and Antonio Maria Bononcini around the turn of the century such parts were increasingly given to the cello. In “The Viennese Viol Tradition” the scholar Hartmut Krones, himself a lifelong resident of Vienna, confirmed this scenario but noted that the viol continued to be used for solo pieces and chamber music in both aristocratic and middle-class circles well into the second half of the eighteenth century.

After lunch the Milan-based luthier Pierre Bohr offered some “Workshop Reflections on the Construction of the Baryton,” accompanied by numerous photos of extant instruments in all their sometimes bewildering variety. Guido Balestracci then briefly demonstrated his baryton made by Bohr (already heard the previous evening in the Haydn trios) before sketching “The Path from Viol to Baryton: Historical Aspects from a Player’s Perspective,”

in which he touched on the baryton's distinct Baroque and Classical phases, the varying number of strings found on historical barytons, and the interaction of the instrument's playing technique and its repertoire. Dieter Gutknecht, a retired musicologist based in Cologne, then provided a more detailed outline of the repertoire surviving in seventeenth-century manuscripts and from eighteenth-century Vienna and Esterházy, noting that many players from both periods evidently preferred to improvise their performances, whose content has therefore been lost to history.

To conclude the conference, Bettina Hoffmann (an active performer on both viol and cello as well as author of a recently published Italian-language book on *La viola da gamba* [Palermo: L'Epos, 2010]) set forth the evidence found in musical scores, treatises, and paintings of the Baroque period for "The Viol as a Chordal Continuo Instrument," demonstrating various possible approaches by applying them to the bass line of a Telemann sonata movement for which Tina Chancey supplied the melody on pardessus.

The foregoing summaries cover only about two-thirds of the presentations, passing over with regret a short welcoming concert by gambists Bettina Hoffmann and Katharina Schlegel as well as papers on the sound esthetic of the viol (Kathrin Menzel), the acoustical function of the soundpost in viols (Murray and Patsy Campbell), the use of the viol in cloisters (Hermann Ullrich) and in Eastern Europe (Klaus-Peter Koch), and by composers including August Kühnel (Ulrike Harnisch), Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel (Bert Sigmund), and Handel (Wolfgang Ruf), as well as in early-seventeenth-century Italian chromatic music (Martin Kirnbauer).

Plans are underway to publish all of the conference papers, suitably illustrated and in some cases revised but for the most part of course in German, in a future volume of the well-established series *Michaelsteiner Konferenzberichte*. These publications can be hard to find in American university music libraries, and are not easy to locate from internet booksellers either, though in principle they are all available by ordering directly from the Kloster Michaelstein Foundation in Blankenburg. (There used to be a complete list on their website, but as of this writing the URL for that page returns a message of "Not found . . . on this server.") In any case, foundation

staff members Monika Lustig and Ute Omansky deserve our hearty thanks for successfully organizing this event, with its wide variety of interesting talks on different aspects of an instrument that holds an important place in the modern world of early music and is of special interest to the readers of this journal.