

I welcomed the detail in these chapters, but some may find them dry. To increase the interest for more general musical readers, the editors could perhaps have included contemporary illustrations of court theatre, church and concert performances; facsimiles of documents or scores; seating plans of orchestras; or portraits of rulers and musicians. However, they would perhaps argue that these would have added volume and expense, and that many are available in the well-known study by Spitzer and Zaslaw, as well as on the internet.

This book could not have been written by a single person. It benefits from the expertise and thoroughness of its fifteen contributors, including the three editors, each of whom has written a chapter, and Michael Talbot, who has provided the foreword. It benefits also from the hard work of the editors in tightly controlling the material, and translating several chapters from the original German. It will be a valuable resource for any historical musicologist investigating this extraordinarily productive and fascinating period of German music history, and I hope it encourages and enables more research in this area, and ultimately more performances of its many forgotten treasures.

Peter Holman, *Life after Death: the Viola da Gamba in Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch*

Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010

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Reviewed by James Hobson

Peter Holman's latest musical offering explores a hitherto overlooked aspect of English music history, the fashion for playing the viola da gamba—or bass viol—in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ Holman, Professor of Historical Musicology at the University of Leeds, is well known not only as a researcher and academic (and co-editor with Rachel Cowgill of Boydell's series of publications *Music in Britain, 1600–1900*, from whose stable this volume comes), but also as director of the Parley of Instruments, amongst other musical outfits. Thus it is with his meticulous eye for detail and a deep sense for the performance of the music—the whole underpinned by scholarly apparatus—that Holman restores life to the viola da gamba on these pages. Holman explains that a seed of interest in the instrument had first been planted in the 1990s, growing into an article written for *Early Music* in 2003,² before its full flourishing in the research for the present book.

Over the course of nine chapters, Holman traces the thread of the survival of the gamba in England from the 1660s onwards. It has commonly been believed that the viola da gamba drew its last in the 1690s, with Purcell the last composer to write for it, but on the basis of the evidence exhibited by Holman, this appears not to be so. His first chapter, "Musicians on

¹ See also Holman's other single-author works, *Four and Twenty Fiddlers: The Violin at the English Court 1540–1690* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); *Henry Purcell* (Oxford: OUP, 1994); *Dowland: Lachrimae (1604)* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

² 'A New Source of Bass Viol Music from Eighteenth-century England', *Early Music* 31 (2003): 81–99.

the *Viol de Gamba*”: Professional Players in Restoration England’, explores the period from the gamba’s so-called ‘death’ to resurrection and transformation from consort and soloist to continuo instrument. Chapters 2 to 8 explore the viola da gamba’s history in the eighteenth century, leading to the ninth and final chapter, which observes the instrument’s continued life into the Victorian period.

Extending the focus beyond composers and works written for the gamba in the eighteenth century, the early chapters of the book also explore the performers on the instrument, both professional and amateur. Holman weaves a sophisticated, detailed tapestry, balancing close reading of sources with biographical and historical research, creating a clear and logical image of the viola da gamba’s persistence (its diminishing popularity argues unquestionably that it was more than mere ‘existence’) throughout the century. In Chapter 3 (“‘Per la Viola da Gamba’: Immigrants in Early Eighteenth-century London’), Holman asserts that Pietro Chaboud, an Italian musician who played with the orchestra of the Italian opera company, was probably the intended performer in music written by Johann Pepusch, and others, in the first two decades of the eighteenth century. However, all traces of Chaboud in London disappear by 1719, raising a question as to the performer of the gamba solo in Handel’s 1724 opera *Giulio Cesare* (Handel had written a clear instruction on the score of his G minor violin sonata, HWV364, that it should be copied in the alto clef for the viola da gamba). Holman has pieced together a compelling argument to suggest that Handel’s intended soloist for *Giulio Cesare* may have been the German musician David Boswillibald, a double bass player in the orchestra of the Italian opera company. Solid research underpins such conjecture throughout the book.

The fourth chapter, “‘Awake my Cetra, Harp and Lute”: John Frederick Hintz and the Cult of Exotic Instruments,’ is a case-study of a London instrument maker working in the mid-eighteenth century. Holman includes this chapter ‘to place the gamba in the context of the cult of exotic instruments of the time, and to investigate the role the cult played in musical and cultural changes in England in the second half of the eighteenth century’ (p. 135). Hintz was successively a furniture maker, a full-time Moravian evangelist, and an instrument maker. Holman goes on to make a study of Hintz and his workshop, citing eleven different varieties of musical instruments that were available from him in the 1760s, including gambas, guitars, dulcimers, and several kinds of harps. Holman explains that London from the 1750s onwards was awash with German immigrant musicians, who brought with them instruments that were otherwise alien to London’s musical culture. A part of that German diaspora included street musicians with hurdy-gurdies (or ‘cymbals’), which captured the imagination of the instrument-buying public. Including the viola da gamba in such exotica makes sense of the instrument in the second half of the eighteenth century, as both a curiosity and also an object of desire amongst several pursuers of fashion, whose biographies are detailed in the seventh and eighth chapters.

Holman continues with a study of Carl Friedrich (or Charles Frederick) Abel (Chapter 5, “‘A Solo on the Viola da Gamba”: Charles Frederick Abel as a Performer’; and Chapter 6, “‘Composed to the Soul”: Abel’s Viola da Gamba Music’), whom he describes as ‘the greatest gamba player in the late eighteenth century.’ Chapter 6 is amply illustrated with some fifteen musical examples taken from Abel’s works. This is a very welcome addition; it is always frustrating when authors of books on musical subjects omit any discussion or illustration of the notes themselves. The most recent study of Abel was undertaken in the 1950s and ‘60s by

the German musicologist Walter Knappe, who produced a thematic catalogue of his works, a biography and a complete edition in fifteen volumes;³ in chapters 5 and 6, Holman brings Abel's scholarship up to date. In order to make available the prolific results of his research drawn from electronic resources (including *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, *British Periodicals* and *Nineteenth-Century British Library Newspapers*), Holman has also produced a supplementary catalogue, accessible online via *The Viola da Gamba Society Journal*.⁴

The seventh and eighth chapters, "'The Heart of Sensibility': Writers, Artists and Aristocrats," and "'The Art of Playing it has never Died out in this Country": Abel's Competitors, Followers and Successors,' are probing pieces of research that demonstrate the viola da gamba's popularity in the eighteenth century, revealing a surprising litany of well-known names amongst its devotees. Abel influenced a whole raft of individuals, far beyond the circle of musicians with whom the viola da gamba might have been expected to remain popular; Benjamin Franklin, Sir Edmund Walpole, Thomas Gainsborough and Georgiana, Countess Spencer, are only a few of those whom Holman has identified. He also explains that the gamba was popular with aristocratic women as an ensemble instrument because it imposed on the player no unseemly distortion of her face (unlike wind instruments), nor any ungraceful posture (as with the violin or cello).

Finally, we are taken into the nineteenth century in the ninth chapter, whose title is derived from a lecture of 1890 in which Arnold Dolmetsch participated, "'Performed upon the Original Instruments for which it was Written": the Viola da Gamba and the Early Music Revival.' The palingenesis of 'old' music in nineteenth-century England is an area ripe for research, and Holman demonstrates clearly that the viola da gamba, although played by very few in the nineteenth century, never really went away. He details its continuous presence, appearing as a theatrical prop in paintings, at a concert arranged by Prince Albert (and coed over in her diary by Queen Victoria), and its use in performances of Bach's *St John Passion* in the 1870s. The chapter concludes with the formation of Arnold Dolmetsch's viol consort, and the rise of the scholar-performer. This makes a natural segue to the second revival of early music that took its hold in the twentieth century, at which point Holman takes his leave.

Life After Death is a very welcome addition to the growing—but still small—canon of works that assess English music and music-making in a period of history that has been overlooked for too long. The book incorporates an extensive bibliography and a comprehensive index, rendering it an excellent volume for purposes of reference; detailed, explanatory captions accompany the photographic illustrations, and it is evident that Holman has groomed his sources with a fine-tooth comb. The only slight disappointment is that all of the photographic plates have been reproduced in black and white. This is a particular shame as some of the pictures, such as John Cawse's whimsical painting 'On her Spanish Guitar she Played a Ditty which Lulled her Old Guardian to Sleep,' lose their vivacity and detail in black and white—you have to hunt hard for the gamba propped up in the corner; in colour it jumps out. However, this small gripe aside, Holman's book serves excellent purpose to waft the gamba on its fascinating movement through two centuries of English musical history.

³ Walter Knappe, *Bibliographisch-thematisches Verzeichnis der Kompositionen von Karl Friedrich Abel, 1723–1787* (Cuxhaven: Walter Knappe, 1971).

⁴ Peter Holman, 'Charles Frederick Abel's Viola da Gamba Music: a New Catalogue,' *Viola da Gamba Society Journal* 4 (2010): 36–73, www.vdgs.org.uk/publications-Journal.html.