It's now clear that no other country in Europe enjoyed and used multiple viols in consort as much as England; nevertheless, second in this particular league table was certainly the German-speaking countries. And, curiously, while we have only one painting depicting an English consort, we have several fine examples of German viol ensembles.

Our recital ranges widely over the seventeenth century, from the early years with three curiously similar sounding friends: Schein, Scheidt & Schütz, to the most significant member of the Bach family before Johann Sebastian, Johann Christoph Bach. And we travel from the North Sea down to the foothills of the alps. We include Buxtehude and his predecessor at the Marienkirche in Lübeck - Franz Tunder (whose daughter Buxtehude was to marry) and another north German composer who worked in Copenhagen, Christian Geist. Giovanni Felices Sances is an outlier here: he was born in Rome, but spent the second part of his life working for three successive Emperors in Vienna, where viol playing was still very much in vogue.

Throughout the 17th century in German-speaking lands, viols were gradually being replaced by violins, as they were elsewhere; but the process was slower than in Italy and we clearly find many pieces where violins and viols were mixed together, and others where the choice of instrument was left to the performers. While the earlier composers, Schütz, Schein & Scheidt certainly had the sound of viols in their minds, later, composers such as JC Bach and Tunder were probably happy for either family to play their music.

After the initial success of Luther's reformation of the church in the 16th century, central Europe was an extraordinary patchwork of overlapping faiths and small political entities: there were kingdoms, duchies, dukedoms, electorates, palatinates, bishoprics and so on. Some were part of the Holy Roman Empire, some of The Protestant Union, and some were part of the Catholic League. It was into this chaotic turmoil that three of our composers were born.

Schütz (b. October 1585 Köstritz), Schein (b. January 1586 Grünhain) & Scheidt (b. November 1587 Halle) were all born within a few years of one another in close physical proximity and became close friends: for example, Scheidt stood godfather to Schein's daughter Susanna in 1623.

Schein was a boy soprano in Dresden and went from there to Leipzig to further his studies. He was Kapellmeister in Weimar before becoming Kantor at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, a position JS Bach was to occupy a century later.

He set out to print alternately sacred and secular publications, of almost exclusively vocal music; however, our two suites come from his only purely instrumental volume, the *Banchetto Musicale* of 1617.

Of the three, Scheidt was the only one to distinguish himself as an instrumental performer and the only one whose fame now rests on his instrumental music. He didn't come from a musical family, but distinguished himself as a keyboard player, and, in the early years of the new century, went to Amsterdam to study with the great Jan Sweelinck. He returned to his native Halle as court organist, working with the English viol player William Brade, and the Kapellmeister, Michael Praetorius. His most productive years were in then 1620s, when he published in quick succession vocal and instrumental music, including the *Ludi musici*, where our pieces are to be found.

All this came to an abrupt end when his employer, Margrave Christian Wilhelm left to join the Protestant side in the 30 years war, and it was not until 1638 that peace returned to a devastated Halle, which had lost over half its population. The musical life of the town took some time to return to normal, but Scheidt continued to write and publish his music until his death in 1654.

Schütz, however, is the composer whose breadth and quality of expression single him out as one of the most significant of all 17th century composers and one of the most profound of all time.

The story of Schütz's education in music is an enchanting one: his father owned an inn in the town of Weissenfels called '*Zum güldenen Ring*', and in 1598, when Schütz was 13, Landgrave Moritz of Hessen-Kassel stayed at the inn and heard the young Schütz sing: *His Noble Grace was moved to ask the parents to allow the lad to come with him to his noble court, promising that he would be reared in all good arts and commendable virtues.*

And so it was that Schütz was sent to Kassel to sing in the choir and be educated. He went on to study law at Marburg, yet was advised by Moritz that Giovanni Gabrieli *'a widely famed but rather old musician and composer, was still alive, I should not miss the chance to hear him and learn something from him'.*

He left for Venice in 1609, and he was to have stayed for two years, yet stayed until Gabrieli's death in 1612.Shortly after returning to Germany, Schütz was poached by the elector of Saxony, Johann Georg and by 1615 he was in practice Kapellmeister in the court at Dresden - even if his

previous employer and sponsor wanted him back, the more powerful elector was having none of it. He was in charge of the largest and most important musical establishment in Protestant Germany. In 1618 he was granted a printing privilege and he began a series of 14 prints that comprise almost all his surviving works.

In 1628 he went once more to Italy, and met and worked with Monteverdi; but shortly after his return to Dresden, Saxony joined the 30 years war and conditions in the Kapelle became ever more difficult.

In 1645, Schütz celebrated his 60th birthday - an exceptionally old man by the standards of the day - and wrote to his employer asking to retire. His request was denied, and continued to be denied for more than a decade. It was not until 1657, when Johann Georg died, that he was released from his duties and could retire on a pension. He was 72 and he was to live another 15 years, in which he continued to write publish his music. He died the most important composer of his age.

Franz Tunder, of the next generation, can be grouped with the North German team. He studied in Copenhagen, and may have visited Florence before becoming organist of the Marienkirche in Lübeck in 1641. He was certainly *au fait* with the latest Italian musical ideas, and he was entrusted with the education of the children of Duchess Maria Elisabeth, daughter of Johann Georg of Saxony, who had been a pupil of Schütz.

In 1646 he initiated the famous *Abendmusik* concerts in the Marienkirche on Thursdays for businessmen waiting for the stock exchange to open. It seems likely that sacred concerti, such as *Salve mi Jesu,* were performed in this context. The piece is originally by Giovanni Rovetta, a Venetian pupil of Monteverdi, given a Lutheran text appropriate for Protestant lands, and five string parts by Tunder.

The next organist at the Marienkirche in Lübeck was to be Dietrich Buxtehude, who married Tunder's daughter, as was common. He become the most celebrated organists of the day, and a young Johann Sebastian walked nearly 400 Km, all the way from Arnstadt in Saxony to Lübeck for the chance to hear him play. He expanded the *Abendmusik* series started by Tunder, and this was probably the occasion for the performance of most of his vocal works, including this virtuosic and expressive work for alto, solo bass viol and continuo. In addition to being an organist, there is some evidence to suggest he was also a viol player - scholars have suggested he is portrayed playing the instrument in a well-known painting called The Musical Company, by Johannes Voorhout of 1674. So it might have been

Buxtehude himself who played the viol for the first performances - he certainly seems to understand the possibilities of the instrument exceptionally well.

Also from the North, was Christian Geist, who was born in Güstrow, but spent most of his life working in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Göteborg. He was a singer and organist and worked briefly under the direction of Gustaf Düben at the Swedish court - Düben's enormous archive of manuscripts is how much north German music from the 17th century has survived. Geist was, like Tunder, up to date with the latest Italian music; yet *Es war aber* is clearly in the tradition of north German settings of the gospels, and could easily have come from a Passion.

Further south, in addition to the three friends, Schein, Scheidt and Schütz, there was the Bach family; and our piece, extraordinary in its harmonic audacity, expressive breadth and melodic flexibility, could have been composed by either Heinrich Bach or his son, Johann Christoph - there are manuscripts ascribed to both men. Johann Christoph was born in Arnstadt in 1642, but he lived and worked his entire life in Eisenach, often with his cousin, Johann Ambrosius, Johann Sebastian's father. It's likely, therefore, that the young Sebastian knew and heard JC play the organ there.

He was highly regarded by both Johann Sebastian and Carl Philip Emmanuel who thought his music 'profound', and who performed his motets and sacred concerti in Leipzig and Hamburg respectively. In JS's obituary notice, JC is mentioned as some who *'was as good at inventing beautiful thoughts as he was at expressing words. He composed, to the extent that current taste permitted, in a galant and cantabile style, uncommonly full-textured … On the organ and the keyboard [he] never played with fewer than five independent parts'*.

Further south still was the Imperial court in Vienna, where many Italian composers were employed, a trend set by Ferdinand II, who had many works of Monteverdi performed there in the 1640s. So important was music to the Emperors, that no fewer than four successive monarchs were also composers: from Ferdinand III in 1637 to Charles VI, who died in 1740. And the viol itself was a favoured instrument in Vienna, even though it had ceased to have a meaningful role in Italy. Italian composers such as Bononcini, Draghi & Pederzuoli all wrote for the viol in their *sepolcri;* and the Emperor Leopold I also wrote for the instrument. Sances, who had been born in Rome, was a boy soprano in College Germanico, and then sang operatic roles in the Holy City. Later he worked in northern Italy and came to

the Imperial court in 1636 to work under Bertali until he himself became Kapellmeister in 1669. There he remained until his death in 1679.

Richard Boothby 2024