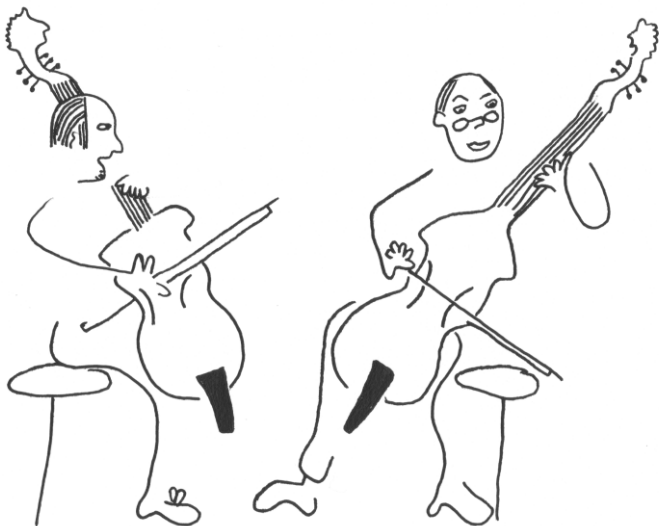


# THE EXCELLENCY OF HAND

## ENGLISH VIOLA DA GAMBA DUOS



ROBERT SMITH

PAOLO PANDOLFO

# The Excellency of Hand

## English Viola da Gamba Duos

Robert Smith & Paolo Pandolfo *violas da gamba*

About Robert Smith:

*'[...] you are constantly astonished by the variety of conversations going on within each musical dance. Smith's approach to this specialist but diverting repertoire [...] is a judicious mix of the scholarly and the pragmatic.'*

Financial Times

About Paolo Pandolfo:

*'[...] one of the most brilliant and poetic of the instrument's current exponents'*

Gramophone

Christopher Simpson (c. 1605-1669)		John Jenkins	
1. <b>Divisions for Two Viols in G major</b> , VdGS 28	[6:29]	15. <b>Divisions on a Ground in G minor</b> , VdGS 23	[4:02]
2. <b>Prelude No. 2 in D minor</b>	[0:18]	Simon Ives	
John Jenkins (1592-1678)		16. <b>Ayre for Two Bass Viols No. 2</b>	[2:46]
3. <b>Divisions on a Ground in D major</b> , VdGS 21	[4:19]	Robert Smith (b. 1980)	
Christopher Simpson		17. <b>Prelude in A minor</b>	[0:59]
4. <b>Prelude No. 5 in A minor</b>	[1:00]	Christopher Simpson	
John Jenkins		18. <b>Division for Two Viols in A minor</b> , VdGS 25	[3:52]
5. <b>Divisions on a Ground in A minor</b> , VdGS 19	[5:47]	John Jenkins	
6. <b>Divisions on a Ground in C major</b> , VdGS 13	[4:56]	19. <b>Air with Divisions in C major</b> , VdGS 12	[5:48]
Simon Ives (1600-1662)		20. <b>Ayre for Bass Viols and Basso Continuo in D minor</b> , VdGS 32	[3:21]
7. <b>Ayre for Two Bass Viols No. 1</b>	[2:50]	Christopher Simpson	
Christopher Simpson		21. <b>Prelude No. 3 in F major</b>	[0:35]
8. <b>Prelude No. 4 in F major</b>	[0:16]	22. <b>Division for Two Viols in F major</b> , VdGS 27	[5:26]
9. <b>Division for Two Viols in F major</b> , VdGS 26	[3:07]	Total playing time	[73:52]
John Jenkins			
10. <b>Air with Divisions in C major</b> , VdGS 11	[5:55]		
11. <b>Divisions on a Ground in A minor</b> , VdGS 20	[5:19]		
Christopher Simpson			
12. <b>Prelude No. 11 in B-flat major</b>	[1:25]		
John Jenkins			
13. <b>Divisions on a Ground in A major</b> , VdGS 18	[4:07]		
Christopher Simpson			
14. <b>Prelude No. 7 in G minor</b>	[1:01]		

## The Excellency of Hand

The term division refers to a particular type of improvisation or composition that flourished in England in the middle of the seventeenth century. Simply put, division music involves splitting longer notes into shorter ones and larger intervals into smaller ones. In order to 'divide' you need a subject, or theme, and this was most often a pre-existing vocal melody or a repeating ground-bass. Think of almost any piece of music and you can make a division on it.

The English form of division was undoubtedly influenced by a similar, sixteenth century, Italian practice known as diminution. In Italian diminution, madrigals (polyphonic vocal pieces) were often used as the basis for improvisation, with diminutions (or divisions) being made upon one of the voices, or in some cases across all voices (bastarda). We have several tutors from the time (e.g. Diego Ortiz, 1553; Riccardo Rognoni, 1594) which explain how to improvise in this manner, and many written-out diminutions were printed and survive today.

Where Italian diminution took melodic lines as its framework for improvisation the later English division tended to take bass lines, with their associated harmonic structures,

as a starting point. This seemingly subtle difference resulted in a strikingly different musical language.

John Jenkins (1592-1678) probably spent the earlier part of his long, happy and healthy life in London, and the later part providing musical services to various wealthy households in England. It appears Jenkins was well liked and moved rather freely amongst his various patrons for example the L'Estrange and Derham families in Norfolk, and later the family of Roger North in Cambridgeshire. Although Jenkins held a position in the King's distinguished Private Musick at court after the Restoration in 1660, he was absent more often than not. Nobody appeared to be troubled by these absences though – perhaps due to Jenkins's affable nature and skills as a musician – and he was always paid nevertheless.

Jenkins is best known as a composer for viol (or viola da gamba) consort and successfully left his own stamp on this medium inherited from predecessors such as William Byrd, John Coprario and Alfonso Ferrabosco II. However, this recording concerns a much less visited side of Jenkins, the virtuoso division music for bass viols. Writing in 1728 (in *The Musical Grammarian*), Roger North laments on Jenkins's reputation, 'His style is thought to be slow, heavy, moving from concord to concord and consequently dull.' Even more lamentable

is that that impression hasn't changed much in the last 300 years, when in fact, '[...] all that he did until his declining age was lively, active, decided, and capriccioso. The private musick in England was in great measure supplied by him; and [his compositions] were coveted because his style was new, and (for the time), difficult, for he could hardly forbear devisions'.

Why isn't this busier side of Jenkins's music as well known as the 'calmer' side? Apart from the fact that Jenkins' music was never published, it may have something to do with where he was working. Jenkins was teaching and writing for amateur players at remote country houses (even today it's at least a three-hour journey from the L'Estrange manor to London). North tells us that 'All his earliest and most lively compositions are sunk and lost, and none remain but those of his latter time, when he lived in country families, and could compose no otherwise then to the capacity of his performers [...] so the whole force of a man is measured according to a member that is lamed.'

Most manuscripts containing Jenkins's division music date from around the 1630s and 1640s. Royal College of Music manuscript MS. 921, which has its provenance in the L'Estrange household, is a second viol part for some bass viol divisions and is in Jenkins's own hand.

This manuscript tells us two interesting things. The first is that besides Jenkins himself, there must have been at least one other gifted viol player in Norfolk to be able to play this difficult music. The second, and most important, thing it tells us is that the performers peppered their divisions with extra ornaments – adding trills, mordents and runs in abundance. We can determine this with three of the pieces in MS. 921, which have ornament signs written in, possibly by Jenkins. The amount and variety of ornament signs is unique in this repertoire and really opens a window onto how this music was performed. Ornament tables exist in other sources but without direct instruction on how to implement them. It's easy to imagine that a talented student was playing the second viol part and Jenkins 'the teacher' wrote in the ornament signs as an example of how to do it properly – Jenkins would likely not have needed to write the ornaments in his own part. In our performances we tried to capture the spirit of these ornaments and replicate them in all the divisions we played.

Also likely is that this music was performed but never written down, in other words improvised; the improvisation of divisions to a ground is the subject of Christopher Simpson's thorough 1569 instruction manual, *The Division Violist*.

241+ 24 Bassz IO ORG.

A GROVND. IO.

Ornaments in MS. 921, Jenkins VdGS 12 (reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Music, London)

Christopher Simpson (c.1604-1669), published his instruction manual, *The Division Violist*, in 1659 and a revised edition, *The Division Viol*, in 1665. It was the first of its kind published in England, for any instrument. The first words of his method are:

A viol in the hands of an excellent violist may (no doubt) be reckon'd amongst the best of musical instruments. To play ex tempore [improvised] to a ground is the highest perfection of it: And this is the subject of our present discourse.

Amongst several dedicatory poems in the introduction is one from John Jenkins who finishes:

Pack hence ye pedants then, such as do brag  
Of knowledge, hand or notes: yet not one ragg [...]  
You may'st desist; you'll find your trade decay:  
Simpsons great work will teach the world to play.

From Simpson we learn that it was considered more admirable to improvise your own divisions on the spot rather than compose them beforehand. Here is a simplified version of his text on how to perform division on one bass viol:

A Ground is written out on [2 sheets of] paper: one for the organ etc.; the other for him that plays the viol who, having the ground as his theme, plays such variety of descant or division as his skill and present invention suggest. In this manner of play, a man may show the

excellency both of his hand and invention, to the delight and admiration of those that hear him.

True it is, that invention is a gift of nature, but much improved by practice. He that hath it not in so high a measure as to play ex tempore to a ground, may give himself satisfaction in playing divisions himself or others have made for that purpose; for here the excellency of the hand may be shewed as well as in the other, and the musick perhaps better, though less to be admired, as being more studied.

After describing how one improvises divisions with two or three viols together Simpson mentions his own compositions for this setting and suggests that young musicians might find it useful to study and imitate them adding 'if you desire written copies of that sort, none has done so much in that kind, as the ever famous and most excellent composer, in all sorts of modern musick, Mr. John Jenkins.'

At the end of Simpson's treatise are found two pages of preludes (from which the ones on this recording are taken) and a collection of divisions for one bass viol entitled 'Divisions for the practice of learners.' The word 'learner' here should be taken in its broadest sense – some of this collection provide the most talented viol players plenty to get their teeth into. What we can deduce

from this is that, despite being less ‘admirable’, Simpson and Jenkins took the composition of divisions extremely seriously and to the highest levels.

Needless to say this recording is not of improvisations nor, save for one short prelude, our own compositions. It is rather a survey of the extant divisions for two bass viols by Jenkins and Simpson. Performing and improvising our own divisions is an exciting project, but one to be embarked upon another day.

One place where Simpson and Jenkins divisions are found together is in Oxford Bodleian Library Mus. Sch. C. 77 manuscript. It has been suggested that the divisions contained in this manuscript would have been performed at the weekly meetings of the music school in the seventeenth century. The four Simpson divisions on this recording are all contained in this manuscript.

Of the twelve divisions recorded here, three are based on a single ground bass that repeats over and over (tracks 1, 3 and 9) and the rest alternate between two contrasting grounds with a typical structure of:

| AA | BB | A1A2 | B1B2 | A3A4 | B3B4 |

(The letter refers to the ground type and the number refers to the division.)

The concept of divisions on a ground is simple, yet in discovering this music we never ceased to be delighted by the variety and ingenuity that both Simpson and Jenkins weave into their compositions – from a simple building block is created a sophisticated and elegant whole.

Simon Ives (1600-1662) is a lesser known English composer who wrote a significant amount of music for viols. Around a hundred compositions by Ives survive in tablature for ‘lyra-viol’, which was a similar or identical instrument to the bass viol but played with an emphasis on chordal playing and in a variety of tunings (See *Tickle the Minikin* (RES10132) for lyra viol music performed by Robert Smith). The ten duos for bass viol exist in British Library manuscript MS. Add. 31424 are simple and jolly, full of imitation between two instruments, but with occasional caprices that add spice such as the jarring harmonic shifts and grand bell-like effects.

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## Robert Smith

Robert Smith is an English baroque cellist and viola da gambaist. In 2012 he won the Bach-Abel Viola da Gamba Competition in Köthen, taking the First Prize, Audience Prize and Special Prize. His performance of a heavy-metal transcription was especially noted. Robert's ensemble, Fantasticus, has received wide critical acclaim for its recent recordings of *stylus fantasticus* and French Baroque music. In 2013 his playing was described by *The Strad* as, 'Intensely expressive, highly dramatic.' In 2014 Robert released his first solo recording of music for viola da gamba, 'Tickle the Minikin'. The recording received many enthusiastic reviews and was *BBC Music Magazine's* 'Instrumental Choice' in August 2014. Robert made a recording of the newly discovered Telemann Fantasias for solo viola da gamba in 2016 which is due for release in 2017 on Resonus Classics. Robert lives in Amsterdam.

Robert studied viola da gamba with Mieneke van der Velden (Amsterdam) and Paolo Pandolfo (Basel). He also studied baroque cello with Wouter Möller, Jaap ter Linden and Viola da Hoog. He was principal cellist for the European Union Baroque Orchestra in 2005/6. Robert plays with the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra

and the ensemble Fantasticus, amongst many others.

[www.baroquebass.com](http://www.baroquebass.com)

## Acknowledgements

*I'd like to thank my teacher and friend Paolo Pandolfo for his generosity in accompanying me on this enjoyable journey. I would also like to thank Rie Kimura for taking care of us during the recording and filling our bellies full of happiness. Eva Gans heroically made the awesome cover in record timing – thanks Eva! And thanks too to Michael Mullen and the Royal College of Music for allowing us to use images from their manuscript in this booklet.*



## Paolo Pandolfo

Widely admired as a virtuoso exponent of the viola da gamba through his concert performances and recordings of key composers from Germany, France, Spain, England and his native Italy, Paolo Pandolfo has in recent years been developing the instincts and skills for improvising and composing. He began his research in the field of Renaissance and Baroque musical idioms around 1979 along with violinist Enrico Gatti and harpsichordist Rinaldo Alessandrini. Studies with Jordi Savall at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland were followed by membership of Savall's Hespèrion XX between 1982 and 1990. A highly successful recording of the C.P.E. Bach Sonatas for viola da gamba (on Tactus) in 1990 saw Pandolfo nominated as Professor of viola da gamba at his *alma mater*, the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Basel, where he has been concentrating his teaching activities ever since.

Since 1997 all of Paolo Pandolfo's recordings have appeared on Glossa. The odyssey commenced with the first complete recording of Antoine Forqueray's *Pièces de Virole*, followed by discs devoted to the music of Tobias Hume, Marin Marais (*Le Labyrinthe et autres histoires* was devoted to character music whilst *Grand Ballet* focused on Marais'

gestures and dance music) and Sainte-Colombe. Pandolfo has regularly ventured beyond the realms of Renaissance and Baroque notated music for his instrument; he achieved a notable success with his own transcription of the six Bach Solo Suites and recorded an unaccompanied recital, *A Solo*. *Travel Notes* and *Improvisando* have further demonstrated Pandolfo's command of the possibilities of the viola da gamba as a composer himself.

His performing activities have taken him all over the world, playing with artists such as Emma Kirkby, Rolf Lislevand, Rinaldo Alessandrini, Mitzi Meyerson, José Miguel Moreno and many others. He has been described as the Yo Yo Ma of the viol. Since 1992 he has been directing Labyrintho, a group of four or five viola da gambas, which is dedicated to the huge consort music repertoire.

Paolo Pandolfo builds bridges between the past and the present, bringing spontaneous and immediate life in the performance of Baroque and Renaissance music using medias such as improvisation, transcriptions and composition of modern pieces, being convinced that the patrimony of ancient music can be a powerful inspiration for the future of the western musical tradition.

[www.paolopandolfo.com](http://www.paolopandolfo.com)





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