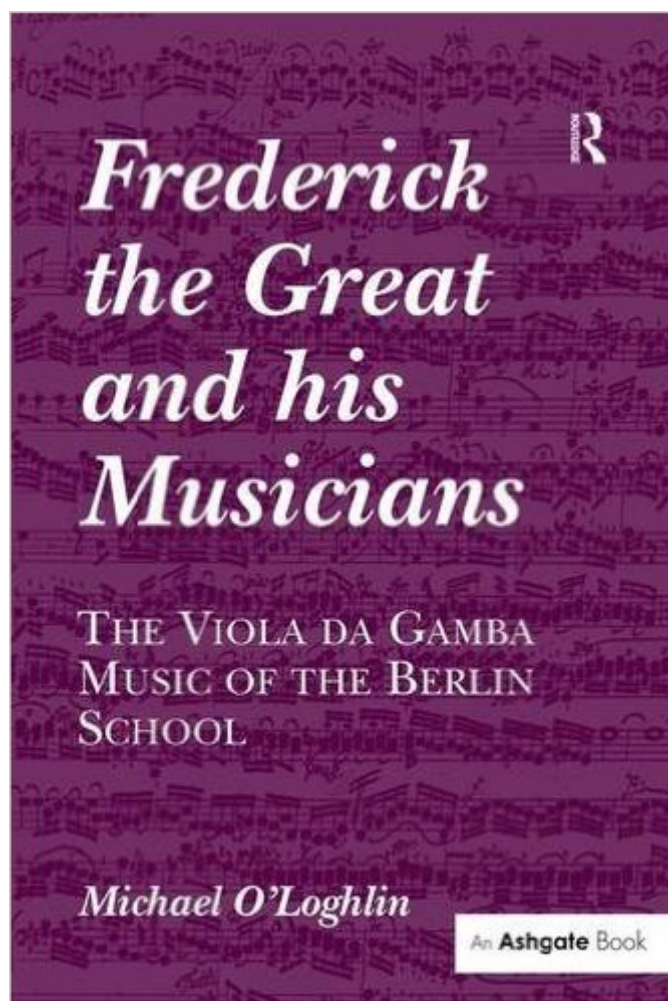


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Frederick The Great And His Musicians: The Viola Da Gamba Music Of The Berlin School



Synopsis

After decades of stagnation during the reign of his father, the 'Barracks King', the performing arts began to flourish in Berlin under Frederick the Great. Even before his coronation in 1740, the crown prince commenced recruitment of a group of musician-composers who were to form the basis of a brilliant court ensemble. Several composers, including C.P.E. Bach and the Graun brothers, wrote music for the viola da gamba, an instrument which was already becoming obsolete elsewhere. They were encouraged in this endeavour by the presence in the orchestra from 1741 of Ludwig Christian Hesse, one of the last gamba virtuosi, who was described in 1766 as 'unquestionably the finest gambist in Europe'. This study shows how the unique situation in Berlin produced the last major corpus of music written for the viola da gamba, and how the more virtuosic works were probably the result of close collaboration between Hesse and the Berlin School composers. The reader is also introduced to the more approachable pieces which were written and arranged for amateur viol players, including the king's nephew and ultimate successor, Frederick William II. O'Loughlin argues that the aesthetic circumstances which prevailed in Berlin brought forth a specific style that is reflected not only in the music for viola da gamba. Characteristics of this Berlin style are identified with reference to a broad selection of original written sources, many of which are hardly accessible to English-speaking readers. There is also a discussion of the rather contradictory reception history of the Berlin School and some of its composers. The book concludes with a complete thematic catalogue of the Berlin gamba music, with a listing of original manuscript sources and modern publications. The book will appeal to professional and amateur viola da gamba players as well as to scholars of eighteenth-century German music.

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