

77. Canzon cornetto (1621)

Samuel Scheidt
(1587-1654)
arr. William Melton

Scheidt, Samuel

(baptised 3 November 1587 in Halle; died 24 March 1654 in Halle)

Scheidt, born in lower middle-class conditions with no musicians in his family tree, was schooled at the Gymnasium in Halle and then engaged as organist at the Moritzkirche in that city. In 1608 he sought out the eminent organist-composer Jan Sweelinck in Amsterdam, and on returning to Germany took up the position of Court Organist to the Margrave of Brandenburg. This title was augmented in 1619 with that of Court Kapellmeister, in which post he served, at least nominally, until his death. During the chaos of the Thirty Years War the Margrave left to fight under King Christian IV of Denmark. The absences of his patron, and hence his salary, necessitated Scheidt's retreat to the church organ at the Marktkirche in Halle. His organ technique was considerable (he was often consulted in the construction of the instruments) and the list of his pupils was impressive. While the war had unsettled his finances, it also had a positive influence on Scheidt's compositions. At a time when Italy, the traditional model in terms of musical style, lay far behind enemy lines, he became a leader in the development of an original northern, Protestant style.

Scheidt was known chiefly for his sacred music and keyboard works, but some other instrumental works have survived. The first volume of Scheidt's four part anthology *Ludi musici* was published in Halle in 1621. The contents are an assortment of dance pieces (allemandes, canzonas, courantes, galliards, and pavaues) meant for court entertainment. Though mostly written for viols, the 18th of their number, 'Canzon cornetto', specifies four cornetts. Since modern reissue in 1959, the work's exuberant give and take of motifs has become a signature tune for groups of four trumpets or other brass ensembles in a slew of late 20th century brass concerts, recordings, and new editions.

Text by William Melton