

Maltzan Collection, rescued from the Milicz palace in 1945 and now in Poznan University Library. Some of these compositions were already known through other sources, but some were not. Particularly interesting are pieces known from earlier simpler versions but subsequently reworked, probably by Abel himself. The contents of the Maltzan collection, and how this music came to Poland, are described by Sonia Wronkowska in *Early Music* 46/2 (May 2018), and she has also done the new editions published by Güntersberg (reviewed in *The Viol* 46, 2017).

The six sonatas on this CD are all from among these previously unknown works in the Maltzan collection, and represent Abel at his more virtuosic and imaginative. The performers are clearly at ease in this repertoire: they not only revel in the technical challenges of Abel's best music, but also deliver each sonata with a sensitivity and rhetorical power that holds your attention throughout. Although all six sonatas are for viol and basso continuo, the accompaniment is varied and colourful – alternating between harpsichord, fortepiano and baroque cello. The sonatas in G major (A2:72) and D major (A2:58) are performed as a duet between viol and cello alone, without keyboard, allowing the instruments to blend and swap melodic focus. The cello sometimes plays the bass line pizzicato for enhanced transparency and lightness almost reminiscent of an earlier French style. By contrast, the sonatas in D major (A2:75) and G major (A2:68) are rendered with just harpsichord continuo to suit the quite restrained but richly ornamented lines, with occasional cadenza figurations notated in Abel's hand in the original manuscript. The last movement of the D major is a vivace easily recognised from a solo version in the Drexel manuscript, but now enhanced with a prominent accompaniment that creates a real dialogue between the two instruments.

The sonatas in G minor (A2:56A) and A minor (A2:57) are performed on viol and fortepiano, to suit the more dramatic *Sturm und Drang* feel of the music. The Adagio of the G minor uses a muted fortepiano registration which gives depth and darkness to the often very high viol line. One wonders how far the recording has levelled the balance between fortepiano and viol, but it works well, and gives the viol scope for the variable dynamics and lyrical qualities that are so important in this music. The playing is impressive throughout – the viol part covering a very big range, and engaging in the kind of virtuosic rhythm and articulation that reminds us why many professionals in the eighteenth century (though not Abel himself, it seems) readily swapped between viol and cello. In the two sonatas performed here with a cello on the bass line, the two instruments complement and balance each other perfectly. The two that are accompanied on the harpsichord show the brighter side of Abel, while the two with a fortepiano accompaniment enable the musicians to exploit a

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### **C.F. Abel: Sonatas from the Maltzan Collection**

Krzysztof Firlus *viola da gamba*

Anna Firlus *harpsichord and fortepiano*

Tomasz Pokrzywinski, *baroque cello*

Dux 1564

We are all familiar with the easier classical-style works by Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-87), many of them probably written for aristocratic amateur patrons and pupils during his London years from 1758, for example, the two Pembroke Collections for viol with continuo or viol and cello, in the conventional *galant* style of the later eighteenth century. We also know the selection of his solo gamba music that survives in the Drexel manuscript in New York, containing not just sketches but also some superb improvisatory compositions which probably reflect the kind of music Abel may have played himself, either in concerts or amongst friends. In these, we hear a far more inventive and technically brilliant Abel, an echo of what were evidently spell-binding recitals by this last great virtuoso of the bass viol – pieces which not only exploit the special qualities of the bass viol like no other composer after Forqueray, but also demonstrate the depth and emotional range of Abel's best work.

Recent research on Abel's music has focused attention on 29 of his compositions found in the

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wide dramatic and dynamic range to suit the mood of these wonderful pieces of music. In short, a CD that does real justice to this great music, and will certainly help give Abel the prominence he deserves.

*Thomas  
Munck*