

Carl Friedrich Abel: *The Drexel Manuscript 29 Pieces for Solo Viola da Gamba*

ed. Günter and Leonore von Zadow. Edition Güntersberg, G333, 2018. ISMN 979-0-50174-333-9. Two solo parts: one in original, octave-transposed treble clef and the other in alto and bass clefs. €21.50.

Joseph William Drexel (1833–1888) and his two older brothers were sons of the Austrian-born Francis Martin Drexel, a successful portrait painter who went on to found the Drexel Bank in Philadelphia. Joseph and the eldest brother were partners in the New York firm of Drexel, Morgan & Co., founded in 1871, while through the middle brother he was the uncle of St. Katharine Drexel (1858–1955), the second American to be canonized as a saint. At the age of forty-three, after just five years in this banking venture, Joseph—unwilling to spend more time bickering with J. Pierpont Morgan—retired to devote himself to philanthropy and civic work. During the remaining twelve years of his life he was a prominent figure in society, including serving as chair of the New York Sanitary Commission, president of the New York Philharmonic Society, and trustee or board member of the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Opera. He bought land in several states where he developed programs to help poor people start their own farms. He also collected over six thousand volumes of music, mostly in manuscript and much of it of seventeenth-century origin. The Drexel Collection is among the prized holdings of the New York Public Library today. In accordance with Joseph Drexel's wishes the Collection uses its own distinct catalog system, numbering its items consecutively from 1 to 6013.

The first twenty-five pages of Drexel 5871 are manuscript leaves in the hand of Carl Friedrich Abel (1723–1787), containing twenty-nine original pieces by the composer for solo viola da gamba. These are difficult virtuoso pieces written for his own use, as opposed to the many easier accompanied pieces he wrote for his patrons and students to play. Many of these pieces have become well-loved staples of the repertoire, for example, the one in A minor that consists of an enchanting series of arpeggiated chords—it is the twenty-second piece in the collection—just five lines long in the manuscript, known as WKO 205.¹ These Drexel pieces are far from neglected. In the Introduction to the present edition, Günter and Leonore von Zadow acknowledge no fewer than five previous modern editions of the pieces in the collection. Notable

among them is Walter Knappe's edition that forms volume 16 in his collected works of Abel (Cuxhaven, 1974); and of further interest are two facsimile editions: the now out-of-print one published by Alamire (Peer, Belgium, 1993), which included an introduction by Knappe, and the newer (undated) facsimile edited by Susanne Heinrich, published originally by Charivari Agréable Publications (CAP 040), now sold by Walhall for €23.50. Finally, I must not fail to mention the modern edition also edited by Heinrich (Carl Friedrich Abel: *Musik für Solo-Gambe: Drexel Manuscript 5871 und British Library London, Add. 31697*, new version in alto clef. Edition Walhall, EW960, 2014.) It is actually not as recent as its date would suggest because it is based on an earlier (undated and discontinued) edition published at one time by Charivari. At €19.80, this somewhat older modern edition, from Walhall would appear to be in direct competition with the new one from Güntersberg, which also happens to be distributed by Walhall!

At this point, if you are anything like me, awash in publication data and catalog numbers, you must be asking yourself, why the profusion of different editions, especially when we could just play from the original? The answer has two aspects. Abel's solo pieces are really good, appealing to performers and audiences alike. However, the manuscript itself, while readily available in facsimile and not extremely difficult to read, is nevertheless not as clear as one might wish. Many players will gladly accept some editorial guidance, especially with regard to interpretation of some of the slurs and rhythms that do not always seem to fit the measure, as well as decisions about how to handle endings of many of the repeated sections, not to mention the occasional questionable note. The von Zadows in their new edition are largely in agreement with the choices made previously by Heinrich. This is true of the rhythmic adjustments in both editions, e.g., to accommodate Abel's repeats, and to correction of dubious notes. Both versions keep editorial interventions to a minimum. For example, unusual and inconsistent slurs that one might decide to regularize in performance are printed as they appear in the source, though Heinrich is more likely to also add dotted slurs to indicate her own preferences. Heinrich documents her editorial changes with footnotes that appear on the bottom of the affected page in the musical text, immediately alerting anyone reading the music to the mediation. By contrast, the Güntersberg edition discusses its editorial decisions in a Critical Report at the end of the volume. This makes the musical text itself cleaner, free of annotations, but it also requires a little more work from the performer who wants to know about such things, and risks that some players might end up blissfully unaware of editorial adjustments. One benefit of Güntersberg's approach is that the Critical Report very helpfully shows a facsimile detail from the manuscript for each passage where they have altered anything, giving performers with a scholarly bent the information they need to come to their own conclusions.

As usual with Güntersberg, the music is elegantly spread

¹ While the numbers of Walter Knappe's *Bibliographisch-thematisches Verzeichnis der Kompositionen von Karl Friedrich Abel* (Cuxhaven, 1971) are still widely used, the discovery since then of many more pieces by Abel has led to the preparation of a newer, more complete thematic catalog of the works of Abel, compiled by Peter Holman and Günter von Zadow, the 2017 version of which is published by the (British) Viola da Gamba Society and is available on their website: <http://vdgs.org.uk/thematic/Abel%20New%20Cat%202nd%20revision.pdf>

across the page, and the scholarly underpinnings are excellent. The edition maintains the original sequence of pieces, numbers them sequentially, and includes the catalog numbers from the 2017 thematic index produced by Peter Holman and Günter von Zadow, though not the WKO numbers from William Knape's 1971 index. Heinrich's edition, on the other hand, does provide the WKO numbers (in her table of contents), though not those from the newer index, and includes a handful of pieces from BL Add. MS. 31697 that are not in the *Drexel Manuscript*. She makes little changes in the order of pieces, presumably to facilitate good page turns as she accommodates slightly larger noteheads, which some players will surely appreciate. A benefit of the new edition is that it includes two parts, the main one in octavated treble clef with the occasional low passage in bass clef, just as Abel had it in his manuscript, and a second copy employing alto and bass clefs in the familiar way. Heinrich also offers choices of clef—Walhall EW935 for the version in the original clefs and EW960 for alto clef—but the two versions are sold separately, each for €19.80.

These pieces belong in the library of every bass viol player with solo aspirations. One could hardly go astray with either of the modern editions discussed here, but if you are having trouble making up your mind I would recommend the *Drexel Manuscript* from Güntersberg along with a copy of the facsimile.

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