

Introduction

When Johann Christian Bach, the youngest son of Anna Magdalena and Johann Sebastian Bach, arrived in London from Milan in July 1762 to compose two operas as composer-in-residence for the King's Theatre, an acquaintance from his childhood days in Leipzig awaited him in the city on the Thames: Carl Friedrich Abel (1723–1787), who, fleeing the turmoil of the Seven Years' War, had left Dresden already in 1758. In 1763 the two bachelors Johann Christian and Carl Friedrich moved into an apartment on Meard's Street, St. Ann's, in the then elegant Soho neighbourhood in northern London. Bach, who in the autumn of that year had referred to himself on the title page of his op. 2 as Music Master to the royal family, had decided upon a long-term sojourn in London. And the joint household with Abel marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship and a unique and almost two-decade-long success story as concert and business partners.

Abel, the widely acclaimed viola da gamba virtuoso, had meanwhile also gained royal patronage: his op. 7, which was composed in 1763, proclaims "Charles Frederic Abel, Musicien de Chambre de S.M. La Reine de la Grande Bretagne." Bach and Abel gave their London debut as concert partners in February 1764 in the Large Hall at Spring Gardens, and already on 23 January of the following year Bach and Abel sent invitations for the first subscription concert in Mrs. Teresa Cornelys's New Carlisle House. The subscription concerts, for which there were soon more interested parties than places, were the first of their kind in Europe; none other than Francesco Bartolozzi engraved the copperplate for the printing of the admission tickets to "MESS.^{RS} BACH' AND ABEL'S CONCERT SOHO."

Up to the present day, Bach and Abel's close relationship has inevitably raised questions as to the whereabouts of Johann Christian Bach's compositions for viola da gamba. An additional piece of circumstantial evidence for their existence was provided by the lawsuit that Bach brought against the London publishers James Longman and Charles Lukey, on 18 March 1773, on account of music piracy. (Abel's complaint with the same accusation followed on 7 May 1773). Mentioned as one of the two contested pirate editions was "a new Sonata for the Harpsichord or Piano Forte with Accompanim[en]t" that Bach described as a "musical composition for the Harpsichord called a Sonata together with an accompaniment for the Viol da Gamba."

On 29 May 1992 a hitherto unknown group of manuscripts, which contains, among other things, two sonatas for harpsichord and viola da gamba and two sonatas for pianoforte and viola da gamba by Johann Christian Bach, was put up for auction at Sotheby's in London. The lot went to a private collector; the transaction remained largely unnoticed, and the music remained unheard. However, my patient efforts were finally able to convince the manuscripts' new owner, and in 2008 Shalev Ad-El and I gave the first public performance of the sonatas in modern times within the framework of the Leipzig Bach Festival.⁹

Johann Christian Bach's sonatas represent the type of *clavier* sonata accompanied by a flute, a violin, or, as the case may be, a viola da gamba that became popular in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. (The term *clavier* did not yet specify the kind of keyboard instrument.) In the four sonatas, Bach proved himself to be a modern, innovative composer. On the one hand, the two-movement form corresponded to the musical taste prevalent in London at the time; on the other hand, Bach chose as his counterpart an instrument that was increasingly falling out of fashion, but whose personification was the famous Abel, who alongside Bach, was the driving force in London's musical life. This inevitably brings up the question: For whom were these sonatas written?

⁹ World premiere recording: Coviello Classics COV 21205, 2012. The CD booklet contains detailed information about the music-historical and sociological context of the works.

Each of the four manuscripts displays a different handwriting, yet only the title page of the F-Major Sonata (Warb B 6b) was inscribed in Bach's own hand. Two of the copyists can be identified: Frederick Nicolay (or Nicolai; 1728–1809), librarian of the Royal Music Library in St. James's Palace, London, and Muzio Clementi (1752–1832), who had been resident in London since 1767/68. The date of composition can only be determined indirectly. Clues are provided by versions of individual movements that found their way as arranged material and with altered instrumentation into printed editions. Consequently, the compositions were probably written between 1765 and 1772, and can presumably be brought into connection with the music-making at convivial gatherings in Old Carlisle House, which belonged to the highly respected riding and fencing teacher Domenico Angelo, and also with the incipient subscription concerts at Mrs. Cornelys's and their continuation at Almack's. Aside from Abel, nobody in the illustrious society of artists at Old Carlisle House seems to have been more predestined to perform the gamba part than Abel's ambitious and erudite pupil Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788). It is to him, the famous portrait and landscape painter, that we owe characterful portraits of his friends Bach and Abel. It gives me pleasure to imagine a scene with Bach on the harpsichord or pianoforte, accompanied by Abel or Gainsborough on the viola da gamba.

Another musical framework seems possible: the copyist Frederick Nicolay was not only the librarian in St. James's Palace, he was also Queen Charlotte's page of the backstairs. Bach was the Queen's music master from 1763 until his death; Abel gave the Queen and her private orchestra chamber music lessons. In 1783 Carl Friedrich Cramer described in detail the roles taken by Bach, Abel, and Nicolay in the Queen's biweekly "ordinary, little chamber concerts."¹⁰ The Royal Music Library not only owns printed editions of Bach's and Abel's works with dedicatory addresses to the Queen, but also eight Bach autographs. The works that were Queen Charlotte's personal property bear her monogram or a corresponding note in Nicolay's hand. Queen Charlotte is said to have been an excellent clavier player. I cannot imagine a more obvious motive for Nicolay's copying activities than the Queen's wish to play this F-Major Sonata herself. The fact that Bach personally inscribed the title page also squares with this hypothesis. And Johann Friedrich Reichardt, who visited London in 1785, confirmed in retrospect in the *Musikalisches Almanach* (1796) that in these concerts it was incumbent upon Abel "to play the viola [part] on the gamba, at times also to accompany the harpsichord." An individual print of the *Rondeaux* from this sonata exists from the eighteenth century.¹¹ The publisher undoubtedly kept his name secret for a good reason; the layout, however, leads one to suspect Longman and Lukey, whose pirated editions had aggrieved Bach and Abel.

The manuscripts' transmission history leads back to Bach's patron, the Earl of Abingdon. We do not know how the sonatas came into his possession; they possibly belonged to the music he acquired from Bach's estate. For a long time, the manuscripts were in Wales, initially in the possession of Merthyr Guest, who was related to the Earl of Abingdon's daughter, then family property. As a result of the abovementioned auction, they became part of the Kulukundis Collection.

Bach specified the two F-Major Sonatas for the *Piano e Forte*. This draws attention to a spectacular London concert on 2 June 1768: "For the benefit of Mr. Fisher. At the Large Room, Thatch'd House, St. James's-street. This day, June the 2nd, will be performed a Grand Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music. First Violin and Concerto by Sig. Pugnani, Concerto on the German flute, Mr. Tacet. Concerto on the Hautbois, Mr. Fisher. Songs by Sig. Guarducci. Solo on the Viola di Gamba by Mr. Abel. Solo on the Piano Forte by Mr. Bach."¹² Just prior to this, Bach had purchased a square piano for £50 from the piano maker Johannes Zumpe, a former assistant of Gottfried Silbermann's, who – like Abel – fled from the war that had broken out in his Saxon homeland, arriving in London in 1756. Charles Burney reported: "After the arrival of John Chr. Bach in this country, and

¹⁰ Carl Friedrich Cramer, *Magazin der Musik* (Hamburg, 1783).

¹¹ See A FAVORITE RONDO ... under Sonata III on page 8.

¹² *Public Advertiser* (2 June 1768).

the establishment of his concert, in conjunction with Abel, all the harpsichord makers tried their mechanical powers at piano-fortes; but the first attempts were always on the large size, till Zumppe, a German, who had long worked under Shudi, constructed small piano-fortes of the shape and size of the virginals, of which the tone was very sweet, and the touch, with a little use, equal to any degree of rapidity. These, from their low price and the convenience of their form, as well as power of expression, suddenly grew into such favour, that there was scarcely a house in the kingdom where a keyed-instrument had ever had admission, but was supplied with one of Zumppe's piano-fortes, for which there was nearly as great a call in France as in England. In short he could not make them fast enough to gratify the craving of the public."¹³ In the aforesaid concert, Bach introduced the newly invented *Piano e Forte* to the English public for the first time as a solo instrument! Both F-Major Sonatas thus very likely belong to Bach's earliest compositions for the new instrument.

Thomas Fritsch
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Translated by Howard Weiner

Our Edition

Johann Christian Bach's Sonatas for harpsichord/pianoforte and viola da gamba are preserved in four separate manuscripts in the **Elias N. Kulukundis Collection**, New York,¹⁴ which have been placed at the disposal of the Bach-Archiv Leipzig on temporary loan for research purposes. The sonatas and manuscripts probably date from the period 1765–72.¹⁵

Although the manuscripts represent the earliest preserved transmissions of the works, according to the current state of knowledge, secondary sources – mostly prints in which the sonatas or individual movements were incorporated in arranged form and with altered instrumentation – had to be taken into account for all the sonatas.

Sonata I – B-Major Warb B 2b

Score, title page *Sonata di Cembalo e Viola da Gambo obligato* – Bach, scribe unknown. Gamba part in treble clef.

Secondary source: *SIX SONATAS. FOR THE HARPSICHORD OR PIANO FORTE; WITH AN ACCOMPAGNAMENT FOR A VIOLIN*. Op. 10 No. 1, printed in London, 1773.

Sonata II – G-Major Warb B 4b

Two parts, title page *Sonata Viola da Gamba und Sonata Cembalo*, scribe Muzio Clementi.¹⁶ The last page of the harpsichord part has been lost. Gamba part in treble clef.

Secondary source: *SIX SONATAS ...* Op. 10 No. 3, printed in London, 1773.

Sonata III – F-Major Warb B 6b

Score, title page *Sonata a Piano Forte e Viola da Gamba di G C Bach*, scribe Frederick Nicolay, title page autograph. Gamba part in alto clef.

Secondary source: *Allegro: SIX SONATAS ...* Op. 10 No. 5, printed in London, 1773.

Secondary source: *Rondeaux: A FAVORITE RONDÒ FOR THE HARPSICHORD OR FORTE PIANO WITH AN ACCOMPANYMENT FOR A TENOR COMPOSED BY SIGR. BACH*. Printed in London, 1773?, GB-Lbbc V1610.

¹³ *The Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, ed. A. Rees, 39 vols., London 1819. The quotation is from the article 'Harpsichord' which was written by Charles Burney.

¹⁴ Concerning the history of these copies, see also Peter Holman, *Life after Death – The Viola da Gamba in Great Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), p. 226.

¹⁵ For further information, see Ernest Warburton, *The Collected Works of Johann Christian Bach* (New York, London: Garland, 1999).

¹⁶ We would like to thank Dr. Stephen Roe for the identification of the scribe.

Sonata IV – F-Major Warb B 15b

Score, title page *Sonata, a Piano, e Forte Del Sig. G. C. Bach*, scribe unknown, gamba part in treble clef.

Secondary source 1: *SIX SONATAS FOR THE HARPSICHORD OR PIANO FORTE WITH AN ACCOMPANYMENT FOR THE VIOLIN OR GERMAN FLUTE*. Op. 16. No. 6, printed in London, 1779.

Secondary source 2: Manuscript in score form, *Sonata per il Cembalo* [e Viola da Gamba?]. US-AUS Finney 8 (9).

Our edition is based on the at times somewhat hastily written manuscripts in the Kulukundis Collection and, while conforming to today's standards in terms of faithfulness to the original, intended for practical use. We were able to clarify ambiguities, omissions, and abbreviated notation with the aid of the for the most part carefully edited secondary sources. Where these clarifications were unequivocal, we have amended the musical text without comment. Changes and additions to the text of the primary sources are substantiated by the secondary sources or by parallel passages, and are marked in the score and elucidated in footnotes.

We have used the manner of notating accidentals usual today; editorial accidentals are given in parentheses. Added trills and dynamic marks, whose legitimation derives from the secondary sources, are notated in small print; editorial appoggiaturas are in given square brackets. We have added articulations only sparingly, limiting ourselves to a few slurs (as dashed lines) and staccato strokes (in square brackets) that are to be found exclusively in the secondary sources. In the primary source, the gamba part is notated in treble clef (to be read an octave lower) and alto clef. We have retained the original clefs in our score; the separate gamba parts, on the other hand, are provided in both clef variants. The bass line of the keyboard part occasionally contains passages in alto or tenor clef, which we have transcribed into bass or treble clef, respectively. We have retained the original beaming.

For over two hundred years these unique sonatas by Johann Christian Bach were hidden from the view of the general public. It is a great pleasure for us to make them available now to all music lovers. We owe a debt of gratitude to Elias N. Kulukundis and Tessera Trustee Limited for permission to publish these works. We would like to thank the Bach-Archiv Leipzig for providing copies of the sources and other assistance, and Shalev Ad-El for proofreading the scores.

Günter von Zadow
Thomas Fritzsch
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