

## Introduction

“There was a time, and it is not very long past, in which Abel set the tone for the musical world; – in which everything was Abelish.”

Carl Ludwig Junker<sup>11</sup>

When Carl Friedrich Abel died in London on 20 June 1787 as a result of his year-long alcohol excesses, Europe’s musical world broke out in cries of sorrow and grief. From Ernst Ludwig Gerber we learn that “Just shortly before his death, he played a newly composed solo that astonished even his most fervent admirers.”<sup>12</sup> Seven years later, the London book sellers Evan & Thomas Williams advertised in *The Morning Herald* from 3 April 1794 the sale of an extensive lot of Abel’s manuscripts, including ten quartets and twenty-four trios with viola da gamba, eighteen solos for viola da gamba, and finally, “Ten solos, in manuscript, by Abel, of his latest compositions, and which he played himself at the Hanover-square Concerts.”<sup>13</sup>

Exactly two hundred years after the appearance of this advertisement, a leather-bound volume of Abel’s viol works, containing ten sonatas for viola da gamba and basso and four duets for viola da gamba and violoncello, was bought at Sotheby’s by one of the most important private collectors of our day. The largely autograph folios display the characteristics of a composing manuscript, whereby the basso part was added under the viola da gamba part only subsequently. The cadenzas and fingerings are also in Abel’s hand; they were not added subsequently, but rather notated at the time the respective sonata was written down. Already in 1882 these manuscripts were sold through the auctioneers Puttick & Simpson to the amateur gamba player Edward Payne; at that time, the description read: “Abel (C. F.) Fourteen Duets for Viol da Gamba and Violoncello, written for his pupile, Lord Pembroke. In the Autograph of Abel and unpublished, and has Autograph of Lady Elizabeth Pembroke on fly-leaf, half-calf.”<sup>14</sup> This description agrees with the preserved form of the book: bound individual manuscripts (in score form) in half-calf leather binding with three-sided gilt edging and added numbering of the pieces (1–14). The gold-embossed title on the spine, “DUETTO / PER / LA VIOLA / DA GAMBA / AND / VIOLON / CELLO / [MS] / C.F. ABEL,” also corresponds to the erroneous information about the contents.

A bookplate pasted into the volume provides the name of Arthur Frederick Hill (1860–1939), another previous owner, who purchased the fourteen works in 1905. In its present form, the book consists of two sections: nos. 1–7 are individual autograph manuscripts with the same layout, each beginning with a single (recto) leaf. Nos. 8–10, in the hand of a copyist, and nos. 11–14 in that of the composer, follow on consecutive leaves with the titles above the first staff. The end of no. 10 and the beginning of no. 11 are found on the recto and verso sides of one leaf; the unknown copyist and Abel thus worked one after the other. It remains unclear in which order and at which interval of time this took place, since the arrangement, binding, and the resulting trimming of the manuscript destroyed any interpretable traces.

The first original page of the manuscript bears the signature “Eliz: Pembroke” in the upper right corner; on this page and a flyleaf, J. Smith, yet another previous owner, copied the entry for “Charles Frederick Abel” from the *Penny Cyclopædia*.<sup>15</sup> Smith also added a leaf after the last page of music, on which he transcribed a further encyclopedia entry of unknown provenance about the “Viol da Gamba, Italian (Basse de viole, French) Kniegeige, German).” The description shows evidence of familiarity with the instrument. The statement that the violoncello had meanwhile completely replaced the viola da gamba,

<sup>11</sup> Carl Ludwig Junker, *Zwanzig Componisten / eine Skizze* (Bern, 1776), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ernst Ludwig Gerber, *Historisch-Biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler 1* (Leipzig, 1790), col. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Peter Holman, *Life after Death: The Viola da Gamba in Britain* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), p. 202. The Williams brothers were referring to the Professional Concerts in the Hanover Square Rooms.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>15</sup> *The Penny Cyclopædia of The Society for the Diffusion of useful knowledge 1*, ed. Charles Knight (London, 1833).

and that many well-sounding viols had been converted into violoncellos, reflects the nineteenth-century situation. Under his signature, J. Smith wrote the date “April 1873.”

Let us turn now to Lady Elizabeth Herbert (née Spencer), Countess of Pembroke and Montgomery (1737–1831), who is thought to have been a pupil of Abel’s. She was married to Henry Herbert, the 10th Earl of Pembroke. Lady Pembroke played viola da gamba, and her husband violoncello and bassoon. The spirit of viol music was still in the air in their home Wilton House near Salisbury: over a century earlier, John Coprario and his pupil William Lawes made music here in the service of the 3rd and 4th Earls of Pembroke. In spite of the music-imbued atmosphere, it appears to have been an unhappy marriage; Elizabeth expressed the grief caused her by her husband’s numerous infidelities in one sentence: “Husbands are dreadful and powerful Animals!” Perhaps for this reason, Elizabeth increasingly sought comfort in music and music-making; and Abel, who had so internalized the wonderful possibilities of his instrument, was able to give her from the abundance. In the year of Abel’s death, Elizabeth left her husband and Wilton House for good. Through the kindness of King George III, Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park was placed at her disposal as a new residence. As unhappy as the union of Lord and Lady Pembroke must have been, we owe to this constellation four wonderful duets for viola da gamba and violoncello that are without parallel.

In terms of their modernity, the ten sonatas for viola da gamba and basso differ amazingly from all of Abel’s viol works known to us. Even keys such as E Major, E-flat major, B-flat Major, and A-flat Major are unusual in solo works for viola da gamba, as is also the frequent shift of the Adagio movements into the dominant or subdominant keys. Abel’s joy in inventing new, unheard-of timbres is always perceptible. If the notated fingerings were not so unequivocally in Abel’s handwriting, we would take them to be additions from the nineteenth century! They are always clearly recognizable as deviations from the conventional fingering and position techniques. Here, Abel favors a left-hand position on the fifth, sixth, or seventh fret on the upper three strings, on the one side, and the sliding of a finger under ligatures on one string, on the other – ways of playing that we all too willingly concede to the aesthetics of the nineteenth century. Abel was the first gamba player to consistently employ these new possibilities. He possibly received inspiration for this during his many sojourns in Paris from an amateur violinist and patron of music who was considered something of an oddball: Charles Ernest Baron de Bagge (1722–1791). In his autobiography, the flutist Jean Gaspard Weiss told already in August 1767 of a meeting with Johann Christian Bach and Abel in Baron von Bagge’s house.<sup>16</sup> Quaint things can be read about him: “Bagge: Baron Karl Ernst B., Royal Prussian Chamberlain and whimsical music lover, lived around 1782 in Paris and died there in 1791. He played viola badly and violin even worse, but considered himself a virtuoso of the first order and claimed to have invented an entirely new method of playing the violin, which is supposed to have consisted of sliding up and down with one finger on the strings, without any further fingerings. The greatest artists of all nations, and including men such as Viotti, had to have instruction with him in order to become acquainted with his method, for which he paid them a Louis d’or for each lesson that they received from him.”<sup>17</sup> Could Abel have had the dubious pleasure of instruction in the new method? And when could Abel have composed the ten Sonatas for viola da gamba and basso? The watermarks in the paper employed do not provide any information. All the mentioned signs of modernity allow the assumption that they are late works by Abel. Might they be the “Ten solos, in manuscript, by Abel, of his latest compositions, and which he played himself at the Hanover-square Concerts” that the Williams brothers offered for sale in 1794? In that case, the present ten sonatas would be Abel’s opus ultimum, his swan song! I am inclined to believe this. And Abel’s obituary cut out of the *London Chronicle* and pasted on the flyleaf of the book is further evidence of this.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Jean Gaspard Weiss, *Autobiographie*, ed. by Tobias Bonz and Eliane Michelon (Beeskow: Ortus, 2012), p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, ed. by the Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 1 (1875), p. 765.

<sup>18</sup> *London Chronicle*, 19–21 June 1787, p. 592, col. 3.

An undated copperplate engraving with medallion portraits by Pietro Bettelini (1763–1829) places Abel in the company of Corelli, Handel, Gluck, Pergolesi, Rameau, and Johann Sebastian Bach in an allegorical composers' heaven. We are spontaneously reminded of Abel's self-confident exclamation:<sup>19</sup>

“Dere ish but one Got and one Abel!”

Thomas Fritsch  
Freyburg an der Unstrut, May 2014  
Translation by Howard Weiner

## Our Edition

The fourteen works by Carl Friedrich Abel published for the first time in our editions G250–G254 are preserved in the abovementioned omnibus volume in the Kulukundis Collection (on deposit in the Bach Archive Leipzig). In order to distinguish it from the well-known Pembroke Collection, which contains numerous sonatas for viol with and without basso, and is preserved in the composite manuscript Add. Ms. 31697 in the British Library, we refer to these works as the *Second Pembroke Collection*:

No.	WV <sup>20</sup>	Title	Key	Pages in the manuscript	Hand
1	A3:1	Duetto VdG+Vc	D Major	5–8	Abel
2	A3:2	Duetto VdG+Vc	D Major	9–12	Abel
3	A2:42	Sonata VdG+Bc	E Major	13–16	Abel
4	A2:43	Sonata VdG+Bc	E-flat Major	17–20	Abel
5	A2:44	Sonata VdG+Bc	G Minor	21–24	Abel
6	A2:45	Sonata VdG+Bc	B-flat Major	25–28	Abel
7	A2:46	Sonata VdG+Bc	B-flat Major	29–32	Abel
8	A2:47	Sonata VdG+Bc	F Major	33–37	unknown
9	A2:48	Sonata VdG+Bc	G Major	38–41	unknown
10	A2:49	Sonata VdG+Bc	D Major	42–45	unknown
11	A3:3	Duetto VdG+Vc	G Major	46–51	Abel
12	A3:4	Duetto VdG+Vc	G Major	52–57	Abel
13	A2:50	Sonata VdG+Bc	D Major	58–63	Abel
14	A2:51	Sonata VdG+Bc	A Major	64–69	Abel

Edition Güntersberg has issued these works in five volumes;

No.	Title	Güntersberg	
1, 2, 11, 12	Four Duets for Viola da Gamba and Violoncello	G250	With introduction
1, 2, 11, 12	Four Duets, Edition for two Violas da Gamba	G251	
1, 2, 11, 12	Four Duets, Edition for two Violoncellos	G252	
3, 4, 5, 6, 7	Ten Sonatas for Viola da Gamba and Basso, vol. 1	G253	With introduction
8, 9, 10, 13, 14	Ten Sonatas for Violas da Gamba and Basso, vol. 2	G254	

Our edition conforms to the carefully written manuscript in all details. The few changes and additions that we have made result from the musical context. They are all clearly indicated: suggested editorial acciden-

<sup>19</sup> William Thomas Parke, *Musical Memoirs*, vol. 1 (London, 1830), p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Catalogue of works, see Peter Holman, “Charles Frederick Abel's Viola da Gamba Music: A New Catalogue,” *The Viola da Gamba Society Journal* (2010).

tals are in parentheses; altered or added notes are explained in footnotes; added rests, appoggiaturas, embellishments, dynamic marks, and staccato wedges are in square brackets; added ties and slurs are given as dashed lines. The original clefs have been retained. However, since not all gamba players are comfortable with octave treble clef, the viol parts are additionally provided in alto clef.

In the Minuet of Sonata no. 8, the unknown scribe made an error: after the first four measures, the harmonic progression suddenly breaks off. The form of the first section of the Minuet with only twelve measures, which is unusual for Abel's compositional style, appears to be the result of an erroneous abridgement that most likely came about through the omission of measures 5–8. Therefore, we have completed these measures after the model of other minuets by Abel.

The world premiere recording of the sonatas and duets of the *Second Pembroke Collection* by Thomas Fritsch, Michael Schönheit, and Werner Matzke, which is based on these editions, was issued in 2014 by Coviello Classics (COV 91411).

For over two hundred years, Carl Friedrich Abel's unique sonatas and duets remained hidden from the public. It is our great pleasure to make them available now to all music lovers. We would like to thank Dr. Elias N. Kulukundis and the Tessera Trustee Limited for the permission to publish. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Bach-Archiv Leipzig for providing copies of the source and for their support, and to Prof. Ludger Rémy for his valuable advice.

Günter von Zadow and Thomas Fritsch  
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Translation by Howard Weiner