

Introduction

With the early type of trio sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord – exemplarily represented by works of George Frideric Handel,¹ Johann Sebastian Bach,² and Johann Pfeiffer³ – as the point of departure, the form of a clavier sonata accompanied by a viola da gamba gradually developed starting in the mid-eighteenth century. (The term “clavier” did not yet specify the kind of keyboard instrument.) As shown by the balance of keyboard instruments in Johann Christian Bach’s hitherto known five sonatas,⁴ this could have been either a harpsichord or a pianoforte, whereby the latter instrument specification, in turn, was a generic term for various different types of construction. In these five sonatas, Bach proved himself to be a modern, innovative composer. On the one hand, his two-movement form corresponded entirely to the musical taste prevalent in London. On the other hand, Bach selected as a counterpart an instrument that was increasingly falling out of fashion, yet whose personification per se was the famous Abel, who alongside Bach was the driving power in London’s musical life. Also Franz Christoph Neubauer, Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach’s successor in Bückeburg, composed such a *Divertimento per il Clavi-Cembalo e Gambetta* in 1781.

This development in viola da gamba music was embedded in a general transition in keyboard music. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, more and more instruments, such as flute, violin, and violoncello, came forward as partners to the keyboard, instruments that in the opinion of the *Zeitgeist* were better suited than the viola da gamba “to attain honor and applause in the future.”⁵ Numerous such examples of accompanied clavier so-

natas are familiar to us: sonatas for clavier and violin by Mozart, Schuster and Beethoven, sonatas for clavier and violoncello by Beethoven.

It would have been surprising if Carl Friedrich Abel, who lived and worked at the epicenter of this musical upheaval in London, had not made a contribution to this new definition of roles.

To be found in a manuscript partbook in the Senate House Library of the University of London, the first of a group of similar partbooks, is a Sonata in C major entitled *F. Abel per il Viol di Gambo*. The three-movement work, notated by the copyist in alto and bass clefs, lacks movement headings. A corresponding work is not found in the complementary bass partbook,⁶ although the structure of the viol part makes it obvious at first glance that this is not a composition for viola da gamba alone. In spite of the notation that is untypical for Abel’s viola da gamba works – Abel preferred octave-transposed treble clef – there is no reason to doubt Abel’s authorship.⁷ Already in 2010, Peter Holman pointed out that the tessitura of the viol part, the lack of any passage work, the recurrence of measures that belong to a bass part, and the middle-voice sections of the viol part indicate that it is a sonata for viola da gamba, whose harpsichord or pianoforte part has not come down to us.⁸

Since the original structure of this lost keyboard part is easily recognizable in the preserved viola da gamba part, we have ventured a reconstruction. With this, Johann Christian Bach’s sonatas for viola da gamba and obbligato harpsichord or pianoforte are now joined by one by Carl Friedrich Abel.⁹

¹ Georg Friedrich Händel, *Concerto à Cembalo Solo con Viola di Gambe o Braccio*, ed. G. v. Zadow (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2010), G189.

² BWV 1027–1029.

³ Johann Pfeiffer, *Sonate D-Dur für Viola da Gamba und obligates Cembalo*, ed. G. and L. v. Zadow (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2004), G061.

⁴ Johann Christian Bach, *Vier Sonaten für Cembalo / Pianoforte und Viola da Gamba*, ed. Th. Fritsch and G. v. Zadow (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2012), G226 und G227. Johann Christian Bach, *Sonata a Piano forte e Viola da gamba obbligato*, ed. S. Wronkowska (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2016), G309.

⁵ Carl Ludwig Junker, *Tonkunst* (Bern, 1777), Vorbericht.

⁶ Peter Holman, “A new source of bass viol music from 18th-century England,” *Early Music* (February 2003), pp. 81–97.

⁷ The first two measures of the theme of the viol part (1st movement) are also found, transposed, in Franz Xaver Richter’s Sonata in D major (1st movement) from the *Six Sonatas for the Harpsicord with Accompaniments for a Violin or German Flute and Violoncello* (London: I. Walsh, n. d.). Aside from that, however, there is no agreement between Abel’s and Richter’s sonatas.

⁸ Peter Holman, *Life after Death: The Viola da Gamba in Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), p. 226f.

⁹ The world premiere recording of this sonata, for which the present edition was employed, was released in 2017 on the CD *Gamba Concertos* by Coviello Classics (COV 91710).

I take pleasure in imagining a scene with Bach on the harpsichord, square piano, or pianoforte accompanied by Abel or Gainsborough on the viola da gamba.

Thomas Fritzsch
Freyburg an der Unstrut, January 2018

Our Edition

Our edition of Abel's Sonata in C major, catalogue number A4:1,¹⁰ is based on the source with the siglum and shelf mark **GB-Lu¹¹ MS 944/2/1-3, part 1, pp. 30–31**. This manuscript contains on two pages the viola da gamba part of the work published here. The title reads *F. Abel per il Viol di Gambo*. Movement headings are lacking. The part is notated in alto and bass clefs.

We have followed the source as closely as possible. The musical text in the manuscript is error-free, so

that we were able to dispense with a critical report. The few editorial additions are limited to movement headings and accidentals (in parentheses) and dashed slurs/ties.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Wolfgang Kostujak for his true-to-the-original-style reconstruction of the keyboard part for our edition.

In the first movement, measure 7 can be interpreted in various ways. If the suggested sharpened tone is chosen, the suggested sharps in the bass part in measures 3, 7, 16, 33, 34, and 40 are also to be considered valid. If, on the other hand, the sharpening of the tone in measure 7 is dispensed with, then the other corresponding sharps are to be disregarded.

Günter von Zadow
Heidelberg, January 2018
Translation by Howard Weiner

¹⁰ Peter Holman und Günter von Zadow, "Charles Frederick Abel's Viola da Gamba Music: A New Catalogue, Second Revised Version," *Viola da Gamba Journal* 11 (2017), p. 73–136 [vdgs.org.uk/journal] and [guentersberg.de/papers].

¹¹ University of London, Senate House Library, London.