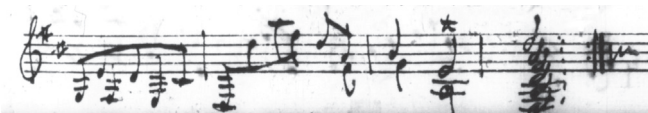


Introduction

The twenty-nine pieces for viola da gamba solo by Carl Friedrich Abel belong to the standard repertoire of every ambitious gambist. They are preserved on the first twenty-five pages of volume 5871 of the extensive Drexel Collection in the New York Public Library (US-NYp), shelf mark **Drexel 5871**. This volume and its history have been described in detail by Peter Holman.¹ Since Abel's handwriting is known – for example from the Pembroke Collection – it is certain that the pieces in the Drexel manuscript were written by Abel personally.²

Abel largely notated his viol music in (octave) treble clef. This had the advantage that he could descend to G without any change of clef. In the Drexel manuscript, however, he went even further and notated everything down to D in treble clef. This is unusual, but understandable if one assumes that he wrote this manuscript only for his own use.



[27] Tempo di Menuet A1:31, measure 65f.

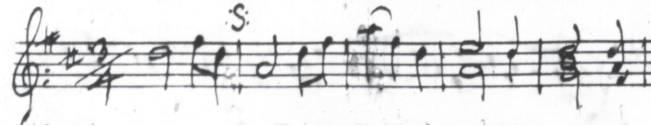
Occasionally, but not consistently, Abel also employed bass clef.

The assumption that Abel wrote out these pieces for his own use is supported by the fact that the manuscript displays wrong notes, omissions, rhythmic inaccuracies, and corrections.

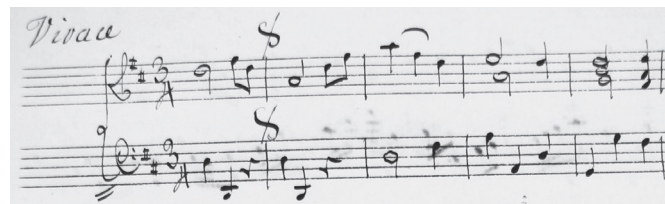
Abel's extensive *oeuvre* of viol music with basso continuo is always preserved in the three-movement form typical for him – the current catalogue of works contains seventy-five sonatas in this category.³ In contrast, in the Drexel manuscript we find twenty-nine individual pieces that are ordered by key, but are otherwise not related to one another. The collection therefore has to be understood as a kind of “collection of material.” Twenty-one pieces in D major are followed by five in D minor. These

are followed in turn by a single movement in D major and two movements in A major. The pieces are very different; only some of them bear a title. Alongside many well-structured fast and slow movements in binary form, there are also several short pieces that can be considered exercises. For a detailed description and classification in Abel's complete works, the reader is again referred to Peter Holman.⁴

There are no concordances in the Drexel Collection to other viol works by Abel – with one interesting exception: piece [19], A1:23, also appears in the Maltzan Collection, which was discovered in 2015, and indeed as the third movement of the Sonata in D Major, A2:75, *but there with a bass part*.⁵ While the movement does not have a title in the Drexel Collection, it carries the designation “Vivace” in the Maltzan Collection. The viol parts in both manuscripts correspond very closely.



[19] A1:23, beginning



Sonata in D Major A2:75, 3rd movement, beginning

This concordance has revived the discussion concerning the possibility of missing bass parts in the pieces of the Drexel Collection. In our opinion, these are still clearly solo pieces that implicitly contain a bass line. Another argument could also be that Abel always notated his viol pieces with bass in score form. Individual parts in his hand are unknown to us.

The Drexel Collection is so important and inspiring that there are already five modern editions.⁶

¹ Peter Holman, *Life after Death: The Viola da Gamba in Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch* (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 203.

² *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³ Peter Holman and Günter von Zadow, “Charles Frederick Abel's Viola da Gamba Music: A New Catalogue, Second Revised Version,” *The Viola da Gamba Journal* 11 (2017), pp. 73–136. Available at <vdgs.org.uk/journal> and <guentersberg.de/papers>.

⁴ Holman, p. 205 f.

⁵ Carl Friedrich Abel, *Drei Sonaten für Viola da Gamba und Basso*, A2:73, A2:74, A2:75, ed. S. Wronkowska (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2016), G308.

⁶ Karl Friedrich Abel, *Kompositionen*, vol. 16, *27 Stücke für die Gambe solo*, ed. W. Knappe (Cuxhaven, 1974), p. 207 f.; Carl Friedrich Abel, *Six Sonatas for Unaccompanied Viola da Gamba*, ed. Murray Charters (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1982); Karl Friedrich Abel, *10 Solostücke für Viola da Gamba senza basso*, eds. W. Knappe and F. Längin (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichshofen, 1985); Abel, *6 Sonatas*

These differ in many respects, which is primarily due to the fact that the manuscript allows considerable leeway for interpretation in terms of form and content. In our edition, we attempt to reproduce the original musical text as faithfully as possible, and dispense with modifications that are not absolutely necessary for practical performance. We retain the original order of the pieces and have numbered them. In the present volume, we reproduce the original clefs, since they best represent the large range. However, we have also prepared a supplement, G333A, that likewise contains all the pieces, but with the combination of bass and alto clefs commonly used by viola da gambists today. We have corrected obvious errors, omissions, rhythmic inaccuracies, and questionable passages, and listed the corresponding passages of the manuscript in our Critical Report. Editorial accidentals that deviate from the source are given in parentheses. Beaming and stem direction are original as far as possible. Thus we hope to place at the disposal of today's players performance material with which they can come as close as possible to the composer's intentions. We of course recommend that instances of doubt be clarified on the basis of the manuscript.⁷

In the past, it has repeatedly been claimed that Abel's viol compositions could be divided into two

categories: first, simple accompanied sonatas that he wrote for his noble pupils and played in his numerous concerts, and, second, the musically and technically more demanding pieces and improvisations with which he entertained his friends in private circles.⁸ These assertions must meanwhile be called into question, since they were proposed before the Maltzan Collection came to light, which was first published in 2016.⁹ This extensive collection contains many musically mature pieces in over twenty sonatas that to a large extent make virtuoso demands unlike anything known hitherto from Abel's sonatas with bass, and that are entirely comparable to the pieces in the Drexel Collection. Even in light of this, one piece in the Drexel Collection remains unique: the Fugue [12]. This thoroughly worked-out two- to three-part piece in baroque form is perfectly tailored to the viola da gamba and shows Abel's excellent understanding of a musical style that was already history for the audiences of his time.

We would like to thank Heidi Gröger for her thorough editing.

Günter und Leonore von Zadow
Heidelberg, July 2018
Translation: Howard Weiner

for Viola da Gamba, ed. C. Denti (Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2002); Carl Friedrich Abel, *Musik für Solo-Gambe*, ed. S. Heinrich (Magdeburg: Walhall, 2014), EW935 (treble clef); EW960 (alto clef).

⁷ Carl Friedrich Abel, *Music for Solo Viola da Gamba*, ed. S. Heinrich (Magdeburg: Walhall), Cap040 (facsimile).

⁸ See, for example, Holman, p. 206; Edition Charters, preface; and Edition Heinrich, preface.

⁹ For all the works by Abel in the Maltzan Collection, see Güntersberg G301, G302, G303, G304, G305, G306, G307, G308.