

LAUDATIO

Good afternoon, and thank you for the honour of being invited to give the Laudatio for my good friends and very esteemed colleagues, Guenter and Leonore von Zadow-Reichling. Before I remark on the achievements which have made them worthy recipients of the Abel Prize, I want to set the scene with some thoughts on the city of Köthen, and Abel himself.

Before it gave birth to Carl Friedrich Abel, Köthen had a considerable history of music. In 1602 the organist Balthasar Sturm was described as Konzertmeister, and in the 17th century performances were given by outstanding guest musicians. Valentin Haussmann appeared before Friedrich III, Elector of Brandenburg, in 1688, and ‘was heard in duets on the harpsichord; whereby he attained such fame that the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen engaged him as director of music, and took his son ... as court musician’ (Mattheson). Although the house of Anhalt-Cöthen was Calvinist it nevertheless encouraged both secular and sacred music, and was in close contact with contemporary musical developments.

No-one would want this magnificent castle to return to the possession of a wealthy prince. Its existence as a public monument and thriving cultural centre is a wonderful thing. However, we can be grateful that those princes had the wealth and means to build it, maintain it, and above all, support a Kapelle of 18 musicians. Here we are speaking of the most interesting of them, Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen (1694–1729), who was a competent singer, viola da gamba player and a composition pupil of J.D. Heinichen. Around 1715 he employed Christian Ferdinand Abel, also a viola da gamba player and the father of our Carl.

So that covers the list of known musicians who worked or lived in Koethen: Sturm, the two Hausmanns (or Hausmänner), the two Abels. Wait, there was another, appointed Kapellmeister in 1717, now what was his name? That’s right, Bach. His claim to fame is that his youngest son was Johann Christian, Abel’s friend and business partner for many years in London.

I have written a bit about Abel, but I was going to research him more for this event. Fortunately, I didn’t need to, because he appeared to me in a dream. He had his viol across his knee, exactly as in the famous Gainsborough portrait, so I recognised him immediately. Falteringly, I said “Carl? I mean, Herr Abel?”

Carl is fine, young man. Here in Heaven we also generally use Du.

Oh, you’re in Heaven?

Oh yes, a bit of boozing maybe, but my contributions are thought to be positive overall.

Absolutely!

You know, I was always up to date. I gave people what they wanted, none of that complicated stuff. Moving, elegant, charming and melodious. I think that young man we met in London, young Mozart, learnt a lot from me and Johann Christian.

Yes he did, and I’ve written that. Do you play viol in heaven?

Oh yes, viol, organ, harp . . .

Violin?

Not so much, they play that elsewhere.

But what about old music for viols? Purcell, Jenkins?

Ah, there I have good news and bad news. Yes, that old stuff is still played, I have no idea why. But – (here he pulled out a piece of paper from under the score on his desk) you’re listed to play Treble 2 on Monday.

My relationship with Günter and Leonore started in 2003, when I wrote a review of the 5 volumes of *Königliche Gambenduos*: arrangements for two viols of French sonatas, prepared for King Friedrich Wilhelm II in Berlin. Soon after that Günter contacted me, and the first publication for which I wrote a foreword was Schaffrath's sonata in A major. Since then we have collaborated on many projects, and formed a close relationship. Only two years later we collaborated on the first Abel publication, his *Six Easy Sonatas* (sic). These works are superb for teaching students who have passed the very beginner stages: they have all the virtues we associate with Abel's music, with joyous allegros and minuets, and deeply felt adagios, without great technical difficulty. Since then, Güntersberg has been the major contributor to Abel repertoire, and not only the gamba music: recently, we've seen the publication of six Prussian symphonies, numerous concertos, sonatas, trios and quartets.

I have always been impressed by the care and love Günter brings to his work. He is fastidious, which is why the editions always get good reviews, and there are basically zero mistakes. He seeks out and engages experts in the field such as Thomas Fritsch and Peter Holman for every publication, but those forewords written by Günter and Leonore are just as impressive. Also, these informative forewords are available to all on the website, even if you don't buy the music, which is very generous.

Now there are two types of people in the world, the gambists and the others. I believe the others may be the larger, and certainly the more unfortunate group. Sadly, Günter belongs to the others. Fortunately he has Leonore. I remember when we first discovered the autograph of Graun's C major sonata in the Sing-Akademie, and I looked at it and thought, is that even playable? Next time I had the pleasure of playing a few duets with Leonore, she showed me that it certainly is! Günter and Leonore always work as a team, and Leonore provided the stimulus for the very first Güntersberg edition in 1998. She wanted to play the fantasies of Eustache du Caurroy with her consort, but no good edition was available, so they decided to make one.

Now we come to the piece de resistance, the AbelWV. There are many catalogues of complete works, and every one of them is a testament to hours, weeks, years of exhaustive and exhausting hard work by its author. I might mention Christoph Henzel's WV of the Graun brothers, also published by ortus, and the work by Thomas Fritsch and Prof. Klaus Hofmann on Johann Gottlieb Janitsch, also a very interesting composer. In this case we had the former Abel catalogue by Walter Knape, good in its day, but now fully superseded by the amazing recent discoveries of three collections including unknown works by Abel. Also the excellent work of Peter Holman, who had the misfortune of completing his excellent catalogue of the gamba works by Abel just before these new discoveries came to light. This work stands on the shoulders of these giants, and can therefore see further than they, while also fully cross-referencing them. However, the best thing about the new catalogue is that it's actually a good read. It's much more than a dry list. It has all these interesting cross-referenced directories and appendices: prints, manuscripts, portraits, etc. Each one of the seven work categories has an interesting preface, and scattered throughout are hundreds of fascinating bits of extra information, such as here on page 45:

This keyboard version was attacked by Abel 1769 in newspaper advertisements: "Wrong Music. Whereas J. Longman has lately published in my Name my first Set of Overtures, set for the Harpsichord, as he calls it: I not only declare my having no Hand in the Performance, but that the whole thing is quite false and improper for that Instrument".

I commend to you this work, not only the most thorough investigation of the works of Abel, but also I believe the most interesting and even at times amusing work catalogue of any composer. It says a lot about Abel, and also a bit about the dedication and personality of its author.