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Reviews

edited by John Moran

Carl Friedrich Abel, Second Pembroke Collection: Ten Sonatas for Viola da Gamba and Basso continuo

ed. Thomas Fritsch. Edition Güntersberg, 2014. Vol. 1: Sonatas 3-7, G253, ISMN 979-0-50174-253-0. €21.50. Vol. 2: Sonatas 8-10 and 13-14, G254, ISMN 979-0-50174-254-7. €21.50.

Four Duets for Viola da Gamba and Violoncello

ed. Thomas Fritsch. Edition Güntersberg, G250, ISMN 979-0-50174-250-9, 2014. €17.50.

Carl Friedrich Abel, 2nd Pembroke Collection

Thomas Fritsch, viola da gamba; Michael Schönheit, pianoforte/harpsichord; Werner Matzke, violoncello. Coviello Classics COV91411, 2014. 2 CDs, €31.00.

Consort Loan Program

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Ah, Abel. What words can describe our beloved Anglo-German champion of the viol who, against all odds, ushered it through the *Empfindsamkeit* of the mid-18th century and settled it firmly into Classical territory? Rare is the viol player who has not come across legendary accounts in contemporary sources of Abel's well-sauced, late-night renderings of his own works. Yet we often overlook the fact that he was very likely also a teacher as well as a prolific composer. These sonatas and duets were composed in the 1770s or early '80s, possibly for Elizabeth Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke (ostensibly his student), and her philandering husband Henry Herbert, the 10th Earl of Pembroke, a cellist who studied with James Cervetto. The Pembroke residence, Wilton House in Salisbury, also holds historical significance in the history of the gamba in England, as the third and fourth Earls of Pembroke had been patrons to both Coprario and Lawes. The manuscript of these works has come to be known as the Second Pembroke Collection to distinguish these pieces from the other manuscript bearing the Countess of Pembroke's signature, which contains fifteen sonatas with bass and is now housed in the British Library (Add. MS 31697). This "second" collection, sold at Sotheby's in 1994 to an American collector, also bears Elizabeth Pembroke's autograph. It is written in two hands, one of which can be identified as Abel's. Among the manuscript's previous owners were the Victorian gamba player Edward Payne, who purchased it in 1882, and Arthur Hill (of the

famous instrument-making family), who acquired it in 1905. The manuscript is currently on loan to the Bach-Archiv in Leipzig.

Edition Güntersberg has issued this collection in five volumes. The Four Duets appear in three versions as three separate volumes: in their original instrumentation for viola da gamba and violoncello (G250), an edition for two violas da gamba (G251), and a version for two violoncellos (G252). The version for two gambas includes transcription to alto clef instead of tenor clef for the cello part, which many players will appreciate.

Advanced players will find the duets sight-readable. The gamba and cello trade melodic material and, while not fully equal, the cello is not relegated to accompaniment. The gamba part favors the upper three strings, and one surmises that Abel chose this register to optimize the blend of timbres and balance with the cello. There are a few instances of shifting above the frets to *d*°, but they are approached easily for the most part. While the first movements of each duet are firmly in classical sonata form, it is the *Andante* and *Adagio* movements that echo the intensity, in a more formal fashion, of his solo works for bass viol (such as those in the Drexel manuscript) and reveal his idiomatic knowledge of the gamba to best advantage. The *Un poco adagio* of no. 11 is by far the most musically stimulating movement of the duets, with the double stops in both parts creating a lovely, resonant communication between the gamba and cello. Surprisingly, Abel uses chords very sparingly in these pieces, as compared to his unaccompanied works for gamba. Whether this is an issue of being bound by the technical level of his student or otherwise, it is pleasant to come across at least one example of his elegant use of double stops and chords.

The sonatas labeled 3–7 present few technical difficulties apart from the fact that some are in keys that are hardly preferred by (or instinctual to) most players, such as E and E-flat major. Abel also employs key modulation from one movement to another within a sonata, such as A-flat major for the slow movement within the E-flat sonata. It's my own guess, based on their playability and the wide range of keys compared to the later group of sonatas, that these pieces could have been written for pedagogical reasons. Sonatas 8–10 and 13–14, however, are clearly not for learners. Florid written-out ornaments, more frequent usage of chords, cadenzas in the slow movements, and more adventurous shifting into the upper fingerboard mark these works as examples of Abel's virtuoso technique at play. One interesting feature found scattered throughout his works is the occasional use of fingering markings, noted in the preface to these editions to be in Abel's hand. Here we have a glimpse into his preferred use of shifting up the fingerboard on consecutive notes on the first finger, but also many instances of staying on the top three frets rather than returning to first position. Sonatas 13 and 14, both in D major, are particularly fine and rewarding to play. They both feature playfully elegant melodies in their

opening movements, contrasting with slow movements in the dominant key. They conclude with a sprightly *Allegretto* and *Tempo di menuet*, respectively.

The companion CD for these editions, issued by Coviello Classics, serves as a delightful audio guide. Thomas Fritsch and his colleagues render Abel's works elegantly and empathically, and provide tasteful ornamentation when called for. The decision to use an 1805 Broadwood fortepiano on several of the sonatas comes as somewhat of a shock, an auditory reminder that the viola da gamba's second Renaissance in England coincided chronologically with Mozart's prime and Beethoven's youth. The alternating use of harpsichord and fortepiano emphasizes the versatility of Abel's melodic writing and the flexibility of continuo forces available during the late 18th century. In a reverent touch, the disc concludes with a heartfelt spoken reading of a recollection of Abel by Thomas Gainsborough: "We love a genius for what he leaves and we mourn him for what he takes away. If Abel was not so great a man as Handel it was because caprice had ruined music before he ever took up the pen."

Fortunately, we can celebrate the genius of Abel more readily now than ever, thanks to this thorough and thoughtful edition provided to us by Edition Güntersberg.

Amy Domingues
Arlington, Virginia

Will Ayton, *Music for Viol Consort a 5, For Grace: Four Fantasias and a Dance Suite*

Allyon Wit Publications, 2004. Score & parts, *ttTB*, \$49.50.

Will Ayton, *Christmas Letters, vol. II*

Cheap Trills, 2014. Score & parts, \$17.25.

Will Ayton, *Salish Sea Images*

Cheap Trills, 2013. Score & parts, *ttTB*, \$8.50.

Fans of Will Ayton will be delighted by some new publications of his compositions for viols, as well as an older publication recently unearthed from the unreviewed archives. Will Ayton is a dedicated viol player, and his love of both the instrument and its core repertory shines through especially brightly in a set of pieces published back in 2004, from Allyon Wit Publications, and dedicated to his teacher, Grace Feldman. The volume includes four fantasias and a dance suite for five viols and comes with a score and five partbooks that feature unexplained but lovely