

Music reviews

A feast of Abel

Jenny Tribe introduces reviews of a wealth of new editions from Güntersberg

On 15 November 2016 I arrived at the RCM for the second day of the International Festival of Viols. I had arranged to meet Günter von Zadow, who had a large parcel of music for me, ready for review. When I opened the box there were ten volumes mainly containing music by Abel, with one sonata by JC Bach and one by Andreas Lidl. Each volume had on the front a charming detail from Gainsborough's portrait of Abel. These of course were from Sonia Wronkowska's newly discovered Maltzan Collection. Günter was keen that I should find several reviewers rather than give everything to one, and as there were many potential reviewers present at the meeting I recruited several on the spot.

Mark Caudle's recital with Teresa Kamińska (cello) included five of the Abel sonatas and the Lidl, all played as duets.

Günter writes: 'There is now an addendum to Peter Holman's new catalogue of Abel's works now on our website. The download link is currently the first item on our home page'. The fascinating preface to each volume in this set can be found online at <http://www.guentersberg.de/noten/en/g301.php>.

Carl Friedrich Abel: Three Sonatas for Bass Viol and BC (G major, A2:68, C major A2:69, and F major A2:70)

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska
Edition Güntersberg G306

Andreas Lidl: Sonata a Viola da gamba Solo e Violoncello in C major

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska
Edition Güntersberg G310

Sonia Wronkowska hits the nail on the head declaring 'our knowledge of Abel's compositions for viola da gamba is constantly expanding'. The discovery of new works by Abel from the Maltzan family palace in Milicz – now housed in the Library of the Adam Mickiewicz, University of Poznań – is extremely exciting. Count Joachim Carl Maltzan (1733-1817) was a viol-playing Prussian diplomat who worked both in Berlin and London, which almost certainly links him with two leading viol virtuosi of the second half of the eighteenth century: Ludwig Christian Hesse (1716-72) in Frederick William's court in Berlin, and Abel (1723-87) in London, where between 1766 to 1782 the Count was a Prussian Minister Plenipotentiary. The Maltzan family manuscripts containing music by Abel, J. C. Bach (1735-82) and Andreas Lidl (d. before 1789) bear English watermarks between 1759 and 1789, which point to the Count acquiring them in London. Indeed we know he was in London in 1787, the year that Abel died and his manuscripts were auctioned.

The Abel and Lidl sonatas are wonderfully tuneful and cast in a typical three-movement form: the first movement is the longest, in a fledgling 'sonata' form, marked *moderato*. The second is a highly decorated, singing *Adagio* and the last movement a well-contrasted, lighter conclusion either in triple time or 6/8: in the G major sonata a *Tempo di Menuet* in the form of a theme and three variations, for the C major a binary *Allegretto*, in the F major a 6/8 *Allegretto* in rondo form, and Lidl writes a 6/8 binary *Capriccio*. The G major sonata is the most virtuosic, with burbling triplet and semiquaver arpeggios and bursts of semiquaver scales, imitated

in the bass, going up to g". The slow movement in the subdominant is a beautifully decorated aria with abundant, touching appoggiaturas. The theme and variations use the same bass throughout, first decorating with triplets, then an embellished form of the original melody and concluding with dashing semiquavers. The C major and F major sonatas have a range up to d". The opening and closing movements of the C major sonata are characterised by fashionable scotch snaps and many triplets. The first movement also makes a feature of pedals which at the end of the development section builds into a flashy four-bar arpeggiated passage ending on a pause inviting a cadenza. The following aria is very heavily decorated with virtuosic demisemiquavers in a manner reminiscent of the Drexel manuscript. The opening movement of the F major sonata focuses strongly on triplets, including a figure of six articulated triplets within one bow stroke. Under the slow movement, in the relative minor, Abel has jotted down a possible cadenza which embellishes a dominant ninth – a very useful model. The final rondo uses lively semiquavers for the first episode and rising double-stopped thirds and sixths with leaping triplets for the second. Happily there are many references to Abel's playing style. Carl Ludwig Junker wrote in 1776: 'Abel will remain agreeable, a sweet singer... whose good, gentle heart you can find in almost every note'.

Lidl's C major sonata for viola da gamba and cello is another gorgeous work. Lidl enjoys using a colourful harmonic palette: the development of the first movement moves from G major by means of a G sharp to A minor, then by using a poignant dominant ninth in its third inversion he makes a passing modulation to E minor, from thence with a chord of F sharp major he makes a passing modulation to B minor. Then via a passing modulation to G major followed immediately by a contradictory diminished seventh he modulates fully to E minor in which key he concludes the development. The sun comes out with the recapitulation back in C major. Interestingly the *Adagio Cantabile*, in the dominant, has a rare

example of a fully written out early Classical cadenza (which my husband has already used as an example to instruct the RWCMD BMus2 string students in cadenza writing). Here after virtuosic meanderings on the dominant he uses an arresting diminished seventh before arpeggios in the tonic and a succession of rising trills to conclude. Lidl also marks occasional fingerings; these guide the player to return to first position, suggest a specific higher position, indicate which string to use for a semiquaver figuration, and indicate the use of open strings for resonance when ease of bowing might incline the player to use a fourth finger.

In short four excellent sonatas for those who want a bit of a challenge.

Lucy Robinson

Carl Friedrich Abel: Three Sonatas for Bass Viol and BC (A major A2:62A, E flat major A2:63A, E major A2:64A)

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska

Edition Güntersberg G304

We viol players are extraordinarily lucky. Not only do we have the best instrument ever invented (of course), and not only do we have one of the largest repertoires of any instrument, but that repertoire is growing at an alarming rate. It's becoming really quite hard to keep up.

Last year we saw the rediscovery of 12 wonderful solo Fantasias by Telemann, long thought lost; and also several sonatas and duets by Abel, discovered in the same haul of music from Schloß Ledenburg.

Now we have a further discovery, and this is the mother lode, so to speak: 22 sonatas previously unknown, found in a library in Poznan in Poland, but originating from the Maltzan family palace in Milicz, now Poland, but previously part of Prussian Silesia. We heard a lecture concerning this significant find as part of the Royal College of Music's Festival of the Viol in November last year, and now these sonatas have been published by Edition Güntersberg.

The volume before me is G304, containing three sonatas from this collection: in A major, E flat major and E major. These are keys not usually found in music for solo bass viol, and this reflects the more adventurous nature of this collection, which probably were used by the composer himself. While none of these sonatas are autograph, they have corrections and cadenzas in the composer's hand.

The A major sonata has the standard three movements, Vivace, Adagio and Menuet. It doesn't represent any technical challenges, keeping within the frets, and with no double stops. It is a very attractive short sonata, but intended for amateur players rather than for the man himself.

The E-flat sonata is altogether a different beast: it is much more ambitious and extended, with a substantial Moderato as opening movement, which employs the full range of the viol. The key makes fingering something to be pondered over, but there are clear solutions which illuminate the composer's thinking. Some fingerings are from the manuscript and could have Abel's endorsement. The Adagio, in B flat major, is singing and lyrical, having also a

cadenza in Abel's own hand. There are a couple of bars strongly reminiscent of the famous Adagio (in D minor) from the Drexel manuscript. The concluding Vivace is a Minuet in all but name, though with a full development section and some of the most effective writing of the sonata.

The accompaniment to all these sonatas is unfigured and could be perfectly satisfactorily rendered on either cello or viol; or equally on harpsichord or fortepiano.

The final sonata, in E major is the most adventurous work in this present volume and offers some of the biggest challenges. The key is already a little further round the tonal spectrum than we are perhaps used to, but Abel's imagination is in full flow here, so the effort is worth it. This is the best of the three and the most virtuosic – the range extends up to a ninth above the top string, and Abel roams freely over the instrument. Although there is no fingering to help us, careful study reveals the composer's intentions. The Adagio, also in E, is particularly affecting, with a fine cadenza from Abel himself. And the final Vivace – again an extended Minuet – the most characterful movement of the set. It will be particularly helpful for players to discover regions of their instrument not often brought into play.

Güntersberg's edition would be a very handsome addition to any viol player's library, having a beautiful reproduction of one of Gainsborough's wonderful portraits of his friend on the rear cover. The type is clear and there are no page turns. In addition to a score, the solo part is included in both alto and treble clef (octave down), with a separate basso part.

Richard Boothby

Carl Friedrich Abel: Three Sonatas for Bass Viol and BC (D major, A2:73, C major A2:74 and D major A2:75)

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska

Edition Güntersberg G308

This music is delightful and idiomatic for the viol. All the movements are in major keys. The middle sonata in C is the simplest to play and is of an easy-going character. It has no final movement – only a 'Modorato' [sic] and Adagio have survived.

The other two sonatas, both in D, lie well under the fingers, but are a little more demanding, ranging up above high d. The adagio movements all require some kind of a cadenza, which in the first sonata is written in, but in the others needs to be improvised or composed. The third movement of the third sonata will be familiar to many, as it is the same as one of the unaccompanied pieces in the Drexel manuscript, with added bass line.

This edition is clearly set out with all editing carefully explained and an introduction setting out the provenance of the manuscripts together with historical background. The solo part is given in both treble and alto clefs and the accompaniment is an unfigured bass line.

I'm looking forward to getting more of the music from this collection. I'd say it is sightreadable for a professional and playable for an able amateur.

Sarah Groser

Carl Friedrich Abel: Three Sonatas for Bass Viol and BC (C minor, A2:55A, G minor A2:56A and F major A2:57A)

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska

Edition Güntersberg G302

Each of these sonatas consists of three movements: Moderato, Adagio, Vivace in the C minor, Allegro, Adagio and Minuet in the G minor, Allegro, Adagio and Allegro in the A minor. The solo part is given in two volumes, one in alto and bass clefs and the other in treble (read as octave treble) and bass clefs. The parts are spaciously set out with bar numbers and no page turns within a movement in the solo and basso parts, and the keyboard only has page turns at the end of sections.

Of the three the G minor is the shortest and simplest with no double stopping and ending with a simple Tempo di Minuet, while the other two have much more substantial first movements and lively final ones.

For all three sonatas the opening movement is the major one both in length and musical complexity, covering the whole range of the instrument and offering a variety of note values, leaps, string crossing and some double stopping.

The Adagios are short, graceful and lyrical. The final movements in the C minor and A minor sonatas are rhythmically simpler than their opening movement but are fast and lively. The A minor sonata in particular has some lively semiquaver passages with repeated thirds or arpeggios.

They are all beautifully written for the gamba and a pleasure to play.

Frances Zagni

Carl Friedrich Abel: Four Sonatas for Bass Viol and BC (G major, A2:58A, D major A2:59A, C minor A2:60A and A major A2:61A)

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska

Edition Güntersberg G303

The four sonatas from the Maltzan collection in this third volume of ten cover a wide range of styles, difficulties, and keys.

The first sonata in G major is tuneful and quite straightforward – ideal for someone who has perhaps not played Abel before or for a more advanced player looking for an attractive but simple piece to perform. It is reminiscent of some of the simpler sonatas Abel composed for the Countess of Pembroke, and also of the ‘Six Easy Sonattas’ (well known to many of today’s viol players through the Hortus Musicus publication of 1968) which were the only printed collection of Abel’s music in his lifetime.

The second sonata is much more challenging (even though in the ‘viol-friendly’ key of D major) and contains many virtuoso elements similar to those found in Abel’s unaccompanied music. The first movement includes a lot of string crossing and arpeggiated passages, often in triplets, going above the frets several times, and just once to a high F#. In the

last movement the music also goes very low, with three low As which falls off the bottom of Abel’s normal writing for 6 string viol. Even the continuo part (often played on cello) goes down to a low B in the slow movement. This extended range is mentioned in the introduction as being highly unusual. Despite all this, it a very interesting piece, and one which I would like to learn for some future concert.

The third sonata is in C minor, following the same pattern of three movements as the D major, with an adagio in the middle. Again this includes some wide ranging arpeggiated patterns, but never pushes the range to quite such extremes as the D major sonata; and there are very few triplets. It has a more mellow feeling than many of Abel’s works – perhaps due to the unusual number of flats – and includes some attractive figurations. It might be less virtuosic than the D major sonata, but still not what I would call easy.

The fourth sonata is closer to the first in difficulty, and is in the same form – ending with a minuet. Although it is in A major – normally one of my least favourite keys – here it lies quite comfortably. The sonata is a previously unknown version of one from the published set of six, mentioned above. The first movement includes some slightly unexpected bowing patterns – a sequence of two slurred quavers followed by two separate ones – which always feel rather awkward and ‘un-viol like’ to me, although perfect for wind instruments.

To sum up, the combination of two relatively easy sonatas and two much harder ones might be rather off-putting both for the inexperienced and the more advanced player. The former might only be able to play two of the four pieces successfully – though they might enjoy having the harder ones as something to work towards, taking only small excerpts and using them to make studies. Yet for the experienced player who is looking only for a challenge, they should still find the D major and C minor sonatas a valuable addition to their repertoire.

The solo parts are provided in both alto and Abel’s original treble clef. I enjoy having this choice, and it means that some of the sonatas could be played on a treble (though this would be an octave higher than intended) or on a tenor, with a bass viol on the basso part. The publication may therefore be used in several ways, just as the printed ‘Six Easy Sonattas’ gave various options for instrumentation in its title.

Alison Crum

Carl Friedrich Abel: Three Sonatas for Bass Viol and BC (F major, A2:65A, B flat major A2:66A and D major A2:67A)

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska

Edition Güntersberg G305

This attractive edition features on the cover a small area of Gainsborough’s beautiful portrait of his friend Abel, painted c.1777. We do not see Abel’s face in this image, but his music is so charming and good-natured that we can imagine his smiling gaze.

This publication is very clearly printed and includes a solo part in alto and bass clefs, a basso continuo part in bass clef and a score. The pitch of these sonatas ranges widely, but does not venture higher than top E and is generally not above the frets. The Basso Continuo parts are extremely straightforward note-wise and give little excitement to the player other than the obvious challenge of providing a supportive and sensitive foundation for the soloist.

The first sonata is in F major and consists of a pretty Allegro Moderato, an Adagio and a Vivace. There are simple chords and clef changes to negotiate. The second sonata is in Bb major, a Moderato, Adagio and *Tempo di Minuetto*. Again there are chords, some of which are sustained, and fast passages of string crossings in the minuet. The third sonata is the most difficult, but possibly the most entertaining to the listener. The movements are in D major and G major, with some slurred staccato scales in the Moderato first movement and florid slurred notes in the Adagio. The final movement is an Andantino with three variations. The variations involve triplets and scales, but the second variation comprises chords of varying difficulty and is more challenging.

I would recommend these sonatas to a fairly experienced player looking for solo music to study or to perform in public.

Heather Gibbard

Carl Friedrich Abel: Three Sonatas for Bass Viol and BC (B flat major, A2:71, D major A2:50 and G major A2:72)

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska

Edition Güntersberg G307

You know what you are getting with a Güntersberg edition don't you? Beautifully presented, clear typesetting, sensible page-turn-free layout, easy to read, parts in useful clefs, and clear informative editing notes. This edition is no exception – you simply open the music, and get on with the business of playing it.

You also know what you are getting with Abel I think. In fact, you might almost say that once you have learnt half a dozen sonatas you begin to get the same things again. There are certain turns of phrase, quirks of melody, 'trademarks' if you like, that make you wonder ten bars into a piece whether in fact you might have played it before. For one of the three sonatas in this edition, you might very well have played it before. The second sonata in this collection is a later (the editor Sonia Wronkowska suggests) re-working of a sonata already published in the Second Pembroke Collection. Both original publications are autographs of the composer, and Wronkowska says it is the only example in Abel's work of a single piece in two autographs. One of the re-workings is the addition of a short cadenza, a feature present in all three sonatas here to decorate the final cadence of each slow movement.

If Abel has 'trademarks', then I think more of them are present in the D major and G major sonatas here. They are immediately cheery, and the keys lend themselves to a resonant, open sound. The slow

movements are beautifully melodic without becoming serious in nature, and the final movements of both feature light-hearted passages of string crossing of the type which sound more impressive to the listener than they are truly difficult to play! The Bb is also recognisably Abel in style, but it sits slightly less comfortably under the hand in the flat key and the sound is less open. It also has a greater range than the other two, you find yourself occasionally on the bottom string as well as clear of the frets (i.e. beyond top C) once or twice. This sonata finishes with a minuet, a dance which Abel always handles with style. Is it just me that often finds a minuet an odd place to end a sonata, and turns the page looking for the final duple time movement?

As ever, Güntersberg are generous in their supply of parts. The bass lines of all Abel sonatas are unfigured, suggesting a lack of intended keyboard continuo. Popular suggestion is for continuo cello, although as Wronkowska points out, there is then the curious problem of the bass line in the Bb sonata reaching the Bb a tone below the bottom string of a normally tuned cello. However, for what is most probably two players, there is a score, separate bass part, and then two versions of the solo part, one in Abel's original treble clef with occasional excursions into bass, and the other in what we might now consider the more normal solo bass territory of alto clef. Editorial interference is kept to an absolute minimum, pretty much just correcting obvious mistakes. The usual quirks of detail in Abel are therefore rife: a phrase repeated in a different key, or even recapitulated in its original place, but bowed differently each time, or things that look like they should be a pattern articulated seemingly in deliberate defiance of it, or is it just lack of scribal consistency? These are the sorts of things that too many editors 'correct' by straightening everything out into whichever pattern they like best, but here players are allowed to make those kinds of decisions themselves.

If you are looking for some typically cheery Abel to add to your sonata collection, of a moderate difficulty and satisfying musical content, then these would be a good choice and in a lovely edition.

Alison Kinder

Carl Friedrich Abel: Duetto G Major for two bass viols A3:5A

Ed. Sonia Wronkowska

Edition Güntersberg G301

This (finally!) provides viol players with a duet by Abel for two bass viols. The shelf mark is PL-Pu7836 and the edition gives us a helpful table of the content of the Maltzan manuscript, all published in modern notation by Güntersberg. The edition comes with four copies of the score, two in alto/ass clefs, and two in soprano clef.

There are three movements: Vivace, Siciliano and Tempo di Minuet. Only the Siciliano goes above the frets once (to a b), and generally the pieces lie really well and are easy and pleasant to play. The two instruments often move in thirds (with viol 1 always on top), and for about a third of the time the second

viol falls back into an accompanying role, resembling a bass line. The first movement introduces the key very easily and pleasantly, with lots of quaver movement and the occasional triplet, but never strays far from the home key. There are some double stops in the viol 2 part in the Siciliano which add some more sonority to a tuneful and approachable movement. The Minuet, as is so often the case, is a bit dull, but if the Siciliano is treated like a slow middle movement, the Minuet serves as a light dessert that rounds off the meal nicely.

So, nothing too exciting, and Abel as we know him from the accompanied sonatas, pleasant and predictable, but definitely worth having on the duet shelf.

As usual, lovely editions by Güntersberg, and interesting prefaces by Sonia Wronkowska (who has written a dissertation about the collection).

Susanne Heinrich

Johann Christian Bach: Sonata a Piano forte e Viola da Gamba obbligato (C Major)
Ed. Sonia Wronkowska
Edition Güntersberg G309

This fun Sonata is from the same collection as the Abel, and in two movements (sadly no slow movement!), for keyboard and bass viol. The edition is based on a version in PL-Pu 7836, and is a reworking of a piece for keyboard and violin. It can be assumed that this arrangement was made for performance at the Bach-Abel concerts, as Abel's hand is recognised in some corrections on page 71 of the full collections (PL-Pu7836, PL-Pu7457 and PL-Pu7458).

It is a very playable piece which lies well on the viol, and even the one instance where it ventures as high as an e above the frets should not cause too much distress, as there is plenty of time and space to get in position. The right hand of the keyboard part and the viol part often play in thirds, and because the viol plays an octave lower than a violin, the keyboard part finds itself either a sixth or a tenth above the viol, but the left hand of the keyboard rarely lies above the viol, and when it does there is enough interest in both parts not to matter. There is plenty of variety and lots of good tunes. Playable, happy music that lacks a slow movement which is compensated for by a minor B section of the Menuet. The viol part comes in two version, alto clef or soprano clef.

Susanne Heinrich