

Introduction

Born in Cöthen in 1723, Carl Friedrich Abel's first position was in the Dresden orchestra from about 1743, possibly after studying with J. S. Bach in Leipzig. Around 1757-8 Abel set off for London, where he soon became known for his performances on the viol and the harpsichord, his compositions, and his direction and promotion of concerts. His partnership with Johann Christian Bach commenced in 1763, and two years later they started the Bach-Abel concert series, which enriched the musical life of London until 1781. During Mozart's visit to London in 1764-5, he was mentored by the two more senior German composers.¹ In 1782 Abel embarked on a trip back to Germany, including a richly rewarded performance for the Prussian crown prince Frederick William. Abel spent the last two years of his life back in London, still active as a musician and a member of fashionable society. In 1787 he died in London, and many thought it was the end of an era. His obituary in the *Morning Post* said that "his favourite instrument [the viola da gamba] was not in general use, and would probably die with him"² and over 20 years later Goethe remembered him as "the last musician who handled the viola da gamba with success and applause."³

These works are typical early classical sonatas on a rather small scale, and players may notice a similarity with the style of Mozart. They are technically easy, but still present the player with some rewarding technical and musical challenges. The first movements are all in bithematic sonata form, the first subjects being charming melodies in the singing allegro style, enriched by galant triplets, and the second subjects often providing contrast by use of simple passage work. The "development" section of mainly dominant harmony after the double bar is quite short, preparing the return of one or both of the subjects in the tonic.

The slow movements are mostly adagios, but they are altogether lighter, more charming and less intense than many adagios by Mozart or C. P. E. Bach, and would suffer from being played too slowly. The slow movement of Sonata II, a Siciliano, has a fermata marked in the second-last bar. This is an indication that a short cadenza, not especially virtuosic but in keeping with the relaxed melodic character of the movement, would be appropriate. The adagios of Sonatas III and VI also offer good opportunities for a cadenza, although there is no fermata marked. In each case, it would be played on the third-last note of the movement, over the six-four chord. In the adagio of Sonata I the flourish in the third-last bar might be seen as Abel's substitute for a cadenza, and in Sonatas IV and V the addition of a cadenza to the slow movement might interrupt the flow. However, such decisions are of course up to the performers, as they were in Abel's time. Every sonata finishes with an approachable minuet in rounded binary form. In keeping with the sunny nature of the works, all except the last sonata are in major keys.

Appoggiaturas are an important element in most eighteenth-century styles. After the middle of the century there was an increasing tendency to write these small grace notes at their correct value, and this is what Abel has generally done in these works. The normal rule which we find in the writings of C. P. E. Bach, Leopold Mozart and others is that they should be played on the beat, and somewhat stronger than the main note which follows the appoggiatura, to emphasize the dissonance and to enjoy fully its resolution in a consonance. However, there are a few instances where Abel's intention is unclear:

Sonata II:

Allegro, bar 42: the eighth-note appoggiatura should probably be a quarter-note.

Siciliano, bars 1, 9 and 11: the sixteenths should probably be eighths.

¹ Walter Knape, Murray R. Charters/Simon Mcveigh, "Abel," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 17 March 2005), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

² Cited in Walter Knape etc., op. cit.

³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit*. München: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1961.

Sonata III:

Minuetto, bar 24; this could be played as written and as described above, or alternatively as in bar 2.

Our Edition

The Saxon State, National and University Library, Dresden has kindly provided us with a copy of the original print by J. J. Hummel, Amsterdam, which bears the shelfmark **D-Dlb Mus.3122-R-2**. It dates from 1771, and is entitled

Six / Easy Sonattas / for the / harpsichord / or for / a viola da gamba / violin or German flute / with a / Thorough-Bass Accompaniment / Composed by / C. F. Abel

The original is in score, with an upper voice in treble clef and a figured bass. A facsimile edition of the original print has been published by Edition Güntersberg under the order number G501. In addition there is a modern edition of these sonatas for Viola da Gamba or other instruments under the order numbers G062 (Sonatas I-III) and G063 (Sonatas IV-VI).

For this edition we have transposed the sonatas by intervals between a major second and a perfect fourth upwards, to better suit the range of the flute and avoid any octave transposition. The original key is indicated on the first page of each sonata. We have made very few alterations to the notes; in these places the original notes are shown in small type. There are a few chords in the original, which we have also shown in small type, except for the note to be played on the flute. In other respects we have followed the original very closely. Notes which have been altered for harmonic reasons are identified. Editorial accidentals are printed in brackets, and the beaming has been unified in a few places.

We thank Angela Koppenwallner for her realisation of the figured bass and Christiane Everling for her advice regarding the flute edition.

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