

## Introduction

Born in Cöthen in 1723, Abel's first position was in the Dresden orchestra from about 1743, possibly after studying with J. S. Bach in Leipzig. Around 1758 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 resulted in a concert series which enriched the musical life of London for many years. In 1782 he embarked on a trip back to Germany, including a period at the court of the Prussian crown prince, Frederick William. The prince's enthusiasm for both the gamba and the cello is well documented, and he rewarded Abel richly for his playing, and perhaps also for these sonatas, which were almost certainly written in Berlin at this time. 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 was not in general use, and would probably die with him"<sup>1</sup> and Goethe remembered him as "the last musician who handled the viola da gamba with success and applause."<sup>2</sup>

Abel was a supreme master of what was in his time the modern or *galant* style. Most of his music seeks to charm and please the player and listener alike, without presenting undue challenges to either party. However, his refinement and even genius should not be underestimated. His success in this style relies on his unflinching ability to produce charming, singable melody, supported by bass lines and a harmonic structure which is interesting enough in its own right but never overpowers the melody. Contrast is provided by occasional sections of comfortable passagework, typically in the second section of an opening *Allegro*, or the later sections of a *Rondeau*, and also by judicious use of well-written chords. In this way and especially in the short passages marked *flasinetto*, Abel acknowledges the technique of the cello and distinguishes these sonatas from those written for other instruments. Abel's use of the term *flasinetto* is as far as we know unique in the repertoire, but it can only mean "flageolet" tones, better known today as natural harmonics.

Abel gives no indication as to the instrumentation for the bass line. The simplest and most obvious solution would be a second cello, or possibly another bass instrument such as a viola da gamba or a bassoon. A chordal continuo instrument could also be used, but it is not really necessary.

The grace notes, or appoggiaturas, are an important element in most eighteenth-century styles. 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. Irrespective of their written length, they take half the value of the following note, or two-thirds if the following note is dotted. Like all rules in performance practice, this one should be applied with good taste and commonsense, depending on the situation.

Michael O'Loughlin  
Brisbane, Australia, January 2007

## Our Edition

These sonatas by Abel are located in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv in the following manuscripts:

Sonata I (WKO 147): **D-B KHM 24** and **D-B Mus.ms. Slg. Klingenberg, Nr. 2**

Sonata II (WKO 148): **D-B KHM 25** and **D-B Mus.ms. Slg. Klingenberg, Nr. 2**

The letters "KHM" mean "Musiksammlung auf der Königlichen Hausbibliothek im Schloss zu Berlin" – music collection of the Royal library in the Berlin castle. In this library we find the *relevant* source for both sonatas. The other sources are copies made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which are based on the KHM source. The original titles are: "Sonata. / il Violoncello. / [Incipit] in G: dur / Di Abel." (Sonata I) and correspondingly with "A: dur" (Sonata II). The two parts are written in score form, the bass is unfigured. According to Walter Knappe<sup>3</sup> the KHM sources are autographs (exception: *Romance* of Sonata I, which is in a different hand.).

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Walter Knappe, Murray R. Charters/Simon McVeigh, "Abel," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

<sup>2</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit*. München: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Knappe, *Bibliographisch-thematisches Verzeichnis der Kompositionen von Karl Friedrich Abel*, Cuxhaven 1971. This contains also the WKO numbers, which identify the works.

However, comparison with other Abel autographs, e.g. those in the “Pembroke collection”,<sup>1</sup> creates doubts as to whether Knape’s statement can be confirmed. Knape states 1782 as the year of origin.

Our edition reproduces the original musical text almost unchanged. We have also preserved the repetition of the accidentals. The manuscript uses four clefs for the part of the violoncello: treble clef, octavated treble clef, tenor clef and bass clef. We have replaced the octavated treble clef by the normal treble clef (exception: to be consistent, the octavated treble clef in *Romance* was replaced by the tenor clef). All other clefs have been retained. The few corrections that we suggest are signified by footnotes or brackets, added slurs are dashed.

In both sonatas there are passages labelled with “flasinetto”. For these passages we are suggesting the following fingering:

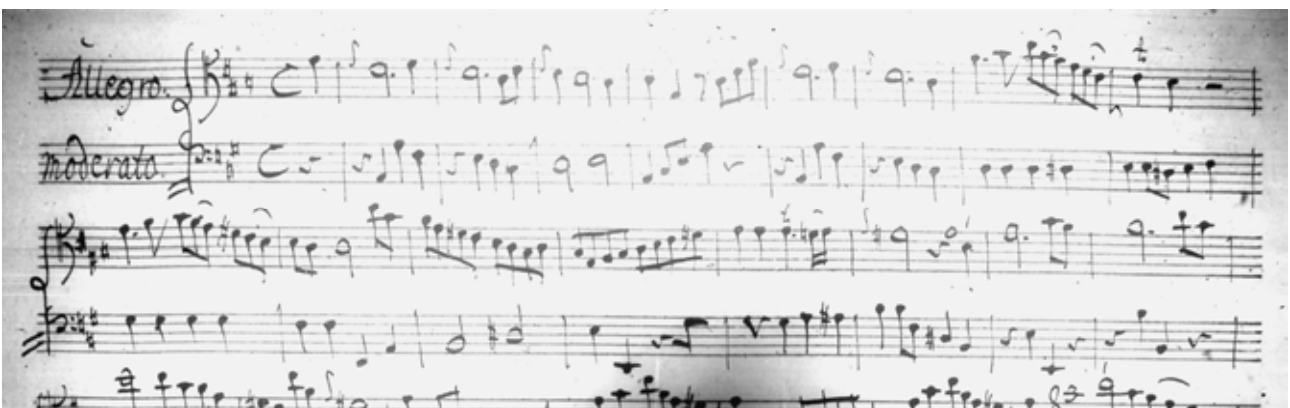
G-Dur  
I Takt 59

A-Dur  
I Takt 52-53

A-Dur  
II Takt 28

We thank Michael O’Loughlin for the introduction, and Christoph Habicht for his practical test of our edition.

Leonore and Günter von Zadow  
Heidelberg, January 2007



Anfang von Sonata II in KHM 25  
Beginning of Sonata II in KHM 25a

<sup>1</sup> Manuscript collection in the British Library, known under the name “Musicbook of the Countess of Pembroke”. It contains works of Abel for viola da gamba, some of which are autographs according to the subsequent owner Thomas Cheeseman.