

Introduction

Carl Friedrich Abel (or Charles Frederick Abel, as he was known in England) was born on 22 December 1723, the fourth son of Christian Ferdinand, a court musician at the Cöthen court. He seems to have studied with J.S. Bach in Leipzig and was a court musician at Dresden between 1745 and, probably, 1755. He arrived in London in the winter of 1758-9 and remained there for the rest of his life, with the exception of two years spent in Germany in the early 1780s. Abel was famous for the concert series he ran in London with J.C. Bach between 1765 and 1782, as one of the composers who popularised the *galant* style in England, and as a viola da gamba virtuoso, though he also played the violoncello, the pentachord (a type of five-string violoncello), and the harpsichord, which he used mainly for teaching and directing orchestras. He died on 20 June 1787 and was buried at St Marylebone Church in London.

The subject of this edition was published as:

A DUETTO, / for Two / VIOLONCELLOS, / as performed at the / HANOVER-SQUARE CONCERT / by Mess^{rs}. Crosdill, & Cervetto, / Composed / by C: F: Abel. / [rule] / Price 3^s / Entered at Stationers Hall. / [rule] / LONDON, / Printed by Birchall and Andrews, at N^o. 129 New Bond Street. / [rule]

The edition is undated, but it was entered at Stationers' Hall (the place where editions were deposited to secure copyright protection) on 25 March 1788, which shows that it was a posthumous publication – which in turn explains the numerous errors in the musical text. There were moves made after Abel's death to publish some of his manuscript works. On 14 December 1787 *The Daily Universal Register* reported: 'We are happy to hear, that the last symphonies, concertantes, and favourite concertos for the violoncello, by the late celebrated Mr. Abel, are not likely to be buried in oblivion; as the manuscript copies have been purchased, and will most likely be published'. They would have been purchased at the sale of Abel's music library two days earlier, though in the event the Duetto seems to have been his only posthumous publication. It is not listed individually in the sale catalogue, though it could have been included in lot 23, 'Scores by Mr. Abel'.

Abel seems to have written his violoncello duet specifically for John Crosdill (d. 1825) and James Cervetto (1748-1837), the two leading cellists in London at the time. The first recorded performance was at a benefit concert for Crosdill at the New Rooms in Tottenham Street on 1 May 1778. Among the items advertised in *The Public Advertiser* that day was a 'Duet for two Violoncellos, Cervetto and Crosdill, composed by Abel'. Abel also played in the concert, contributing his customary viola da gamba solo. Although he seems to have played the violoncello in ensembles, he is not known to have played any solos in public on the instrument after his first year in England, preferring to concentrate on the gamba. Subsequent advertisements in *The Public Advertiser* show that Crosdill and Cervetto played the work at Carlisle House on 4 March 1779, at the Hanover Square Rooms four days later in a benefit for Brigida Giorgi, and at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket on 17 February 1780 during a benefit for the Fund for Decayed Musicians. The phrase on the title-page 'As performed at the HANOVER-SQUARE CONCERT' suggests that it was also played repeatedly in the main series of the Bach-Abel concerts, given at that time at the Hanover Square Rooms. Since they were exclusive subscription concerts aimed at the aristocracy, their programmes were not advertised, so it is not known in most cases what was played.

Abel's duet is a bravura piece fully exploiting the technique of two virtuoso cellists. As with most eighteenth-century duets, the two instruments take turns playing the solo part and the bass, and from time to time they play passagework together in thirds. Abel exploits the whole range of the violoncello from D to e^{'''}, frequently using idiomatic broken-chord figures and chords. A notable feature is the extended duet cadenza printed at the end of the central Andante, which appears to be an optional insertion intended to replace the last two bars of the movement. The concluding Tempo di Menuetto also has cadenza-like passages, but within the structure of the main movement. The three-movement structure of the duet, with a bravura Allegro in duple time, an Andante in G major, the subdominant key, and a concluding minuet-like movement, is one of the most common patterns used by Abel and his contemporaries. Although essentially in the relaxed *galant* style associated with Abel and J.C. Bach, the work is one of the most ambitious, demanding and rewarding in the eighteenth-century duet repertory, and deserves to be taken up by cellists today.

Peter Holman
Colchester, June 2008

References

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W. Knape, M.R. Charters and S. McVeigh, 'Carl [Karl] Friedrich Abel', *Grove Music Online [GMO]*, at www.grovemusic.com.

G. Sadler and M. Đurić Speare, 'John Crosdill [Crosdell, Crossdill, Crusdile]', *GMO*.

G. Sadler and M. Đurić Speare, 'James Cervetto', *GMO*.

Our Edition

Our edition contains in addition to the modern edition also a complete facsimile of the original print of the duet which is housed in the **Glasgow University Library, Special Collections Department**.

Our modern edition is intended for practical use, though all changes to the original are noted. The original accidentals have been retained; all added accidentals are in brackets. The original is mostly in tenor and bass clefs, with occasional alto and treble clefs – the latter to be played down the octave as usual in Abel's gamba works. We have mostly retained the original clefs but have changed the alto and octave-transposing treble clefs; we use the ordinary treble clef in high passages.

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Günter und Leonore von Zadow
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