

Introduction

Carl Friedrich (or Charles Frederick) Abel was the greatest viola da gamba player of the second half of the eighteenth century, and was one of the most prolific composers for his instrument.¹⁰ He was a prominent figure in London's concert life for nearly thirty years, from his arrival in England in the winter of 1758-9 until shortly before his death on 20 June 1787. His standard practice in public concerts was to play one or two 'solos' or sonatas for gamba and bass, though he is also known to have played concertos and to have taken part in chamber music, much of which seems to be lost. In the spring of 1794 the London booksellers Evan and Thomas Williams offered for sale 'TEN Quartetts, in score, for a Viola da Gamba, Flute, Violin and Violoncello in Abel's handwriting' as well as 'Twenty-four Trios, in score, for a Viola da Gamba, Violin, and Violoncello, by Abel, and in his own hand-writing'.¹¹ Only one of these quartets seems to survive today, the G major WKO 227 / A6:1 (Edition Güntersberg G199),¹² though more of the trios appear to exist hidden in works published for violin, violoncello and bass.

The main evidence for this comes from a law suit initiated by Abel in 1773 against the publishers James Longman and Charles Lukey.¹³ It concerned a Longman and Lukey publication, *Les suites des trios premieres, trios pour le violon, violoncello et bass*, containing three trios by Abel that he claimed had been published without his consent. He also revealed that two of the trios had been composed 'about ten years ago' – that is, around 1763 – and that they had originally been composed for 'a Flute, Viol di gamba and a Bass'. Unfortunately, this publication does not survive complete – the violin part is lost – though their gamba parts (published as for violoncello) are similar in style and range to those in Abel's *Six Sonatas for a Violin, Violoncello & Base*, op. 9, which makes it likely that these sonatas were originally written for violin, gamba and bass, and were among the 24 trios for those instruments advertised in 1794. There were not enough gamba players in England at the time to make it worth publishing music especially for them, so it is not surprising that music written for their instrument appeared in other guises. Thus Abel published *Six Easy Sonattas* WKO 141-6 / A2:1-6 (Edition Güntersberg G062, 063, 501) in 1773, advertising them 'for the HARPSICHORD or for A VIOLA DA GAMBA VIOLIN or GERMAN FLUTE' despite the fact that they were clearly originally written for gamba.¹⁴

Abel published his *Six Sonatas*, op. 9 himself: he gave his London address on the title-page as 201 Oxford Street and stated that the publication was 'Sold also by R. Bremner in the Strand'; Robert Bremner was his main London publisher. It is conventionally dated 1772, though there is no date on its title-page and it does not seem to have been advertised by Bremner in the London newspapers. However, it was presumably published sometime between September 1769, when Bremner listed Abel's works opp. 1-8 in an advertisement, and March 1773, when he first advertised Abel's *Six Simphonies*, op. 10.¹⁵ Abel described the scoring on the title-page as 'for a Violin, a Violoncello, & Base, with a Thorough Base for the HARPSICHORD', giving the impression that there were four part-books, but in fact there are only three, labelled respectively 'VIOLINO', 'VIOLONCELLO' and 'BASSO' – a figured continuo part. The violoncello parts are eminently suitable for the gamba: they have the overall range *A-d''*, lie mostly in the alto-tenor register characteristic of gamba parts at the time, and have no 'cello-like' chords.

Abel's op. 9 sonatas belong to a long tradition of sonatas for violin, gamba and continuo, an alternative to the two-violin type especially popular in Germany. In the seventeenth century the gamba part

continued on page 32

¹⁰ For Abel and his gamba music, see Peter Holman, *Life after Death: the Viola da Gamba in Britain from Purcell to Dolmetsch* (Woodbridge, 2010), ch. 5 and 6.

¹¹ *The Morning Herald*, 3 April 1794.

¹² For the numbering of Abel's gamba music, see Peter Holman, 'Charles Frederick Abel's Viola da Gamba Music: a New Catalogue', *The Viola da Gamba Society Journal*, 4 (2010), pp. 36-73 (<http://www.vdgs.org.uk/publications-Journal.html>).

¹³ For the case, see Holman *Life after Death*, pp. 224-6.

¹⁴ Holman, *Life after Death*, pp. 218-21.

¹⁵ *London Chronicle*, 21-23 September 1769; *Public Advertiser*, 5 March 1773.

usually doubled or elaborated the continuo part, making a second bowed bass instrument unnecessary, though in the eighteenth century the gamba parts tend to be independent of the bass, requiring the continuo line to be doubled. This is true of Pepusch's sonatas for soprano instrument (violin, flute or recorder), gamba and continuo,¹⁶ and those by Telemann for the same instruments,¹⁷ as well as Abel's sonatas. After about 1720 the gamba was mostly used to play obbligato parts, leaving bass parts to be played by the violoncello.¹⁸ The bass parts of late gamba music often call specifically for violoncello, and the 1794 advertisement lists the scoring of Abel's 24 trios as 'a Viola da Gamba, Violin, and Violoncello'. Abel's op. 9 sonatas are charming works in the *galant* style, all using the double-barrelled pattern popular in London at the time for light chamber music: an expansive sonata-pattern movement in duple time is followed by a minuet or minuet-like movement in triple time.

Peter Holman
Colchester, October 2011

Our Edition

The music is almost error-free in the original, however the articulation is not always consistent. Our edition largely follows the original, though to help modern players we have adjusted the articulation of parallel passages where necessary. All our modifications and additions are indicated: added or modified accidentals and staccato markings are in brackets and added slurs or ties are dotted. All other changes are explained in footnotes in the score.

We thank Peter Holman for his idea for this edition, for his advice, and for his introduction. We also thank Lore Everling and Heidi Groeger for their proofreading of the score.

Günter and Leonore von Zadow
Heidelberg, October 2011

The image displays two pages of musical notation for 'SONATA I' in G major, Moderato. The top page is for VIOLONCELLO and the bottom page is for BASSO. Both pages show the first two staves of the piece, with various musical notations including notes, rests, slurs, and dynamics like 'p.'.

¹⁶ Surveyed in Holman, *Life after Death*, pp. 102–4.

¹⁷ Telemann's works with gamba parts are discussed and listed in Fred Flassig, *Die soloistische Gambenmusik in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1998), pp. 88–105, 298–303.

¹⁸ See the discussions in Holman, *Life after Death*, pp. 46–7, 132–4.