

Introduction

Johann Melchior Dreyer was born on 24 June 1747 in the small village of Röttingen in the county of Oettingen-Baldern (today a part of Lauchheim, Ostalb district, Baden-Württemberg) as the son of a blacksmith. He probably received his musical training from the Jesuits in Ellwangen, where he attended high school. In the Ellwangen municipal records, he appears for the first time in August 1767 in connection with his application for the position of “senior schoolmaster.” Since he “was well advanced in the *studiis inferioribus et philosophiae* and impressively well versed in music,” the authorities did not have any objections to an appointment. On 28 September 1767 he married the daughter of his deceased predecessor, whose duties he subsequently assumed. The decree of appointment dates from 30 September. Among the responsibilities of the twenty-year-old musician, whose skills as a singer, violinist, and organist are praised in the documents, included the supervision of the music in St. Mary’s Parish Church. In addition, he also participated in the court music establishment of the Ellwangen Imperial Abbey.

From May 1779 he held the position of organist at the abbey church after having already secured an entitlement to this post in 1773. In April 1790 he was additionally appointed to the office of *Chorregent* (choirmaster), which until then had always been reserved for clergy. In 1802 he also assumed the duties of the *Stiftskantor* (director of music of the abbey) so that, at least for a short time, he occupied the three main positions of the monastery’s musical establishment in personal union. From 1791 he is styled as *Principalis Ecclesiae Elvacensis Organaedi ac Musices Director* on the title pages of his published compositions. In 1803 the Ellwangen Imperial Abbey was secularized, and the territory of the *Fürstpropstei* (princely priory) devolved to Württemberg. Dreyer transferred to municipal employment. In 1816 he still appeared on the title page of the second edition of his “German Mass” as *Chorregent an der Stifts-Pfarrkirche in Ellwangen* (choirmaster of the Abbey Parish Church in Ellwangen). He died on 22 March 1824 and was buried two days later in the St. Wolfgang’s Cemetery. His grave has not been preserved.

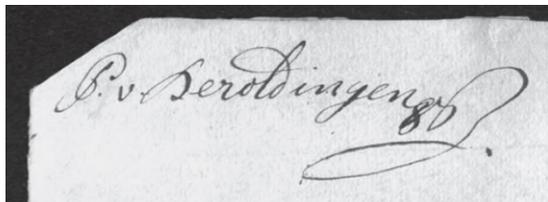
Although Dreyer seems hardly ever to have left the northwest region of Swabia around Ellwangen for a longer period, his music found wide dissemination in central Europe and beyond well into the nineteenth century. Between 1782 and 1816 numerous, almost exclusively multi-part printed editions of his works were issued by the Augsburg music publisher Lotter, which have been preserved in many libraries and archives in Europe and in isolated instances even in the USA and Russia. In spite of this, the name Johann Melchior Dreyer is today known only to very few people, and his *oeuvre*, which, with over fifty Mass and Requiem settings and numerous smaller compositions for the worship service, is predominantly made up of sacred music, has fallen into oblivion. Responsible for this were certainly above all the leaders of Cecilianism, a very influential reform movement in the nineteenth century that rejected the (homophonic) church music of the Classical era and championed a return to the so-called ancient-classical vocal polyphony (i.e., Palestrina style). The Cecilians vehemently criticized Dreyer’s works, and he was once even vilified as belonging to the “ballad-monger guild in the church.” As a consequence, his very popular Masses, offertories and litanies, his Psalms and *Tantum ergo*, and whatever else he had composed to the glory of God disappeared from use in church music.

Until recently, Dreyer’s instrumental works were thought to consist merely of three string quartets of which there exist versions for piano, violin, and viola (Mannheim: Götz, 1782), twenty-four organ sonatas (Augsburg: Lotter, 1800/1803), and twelve symphonies (Augsburg: Lotter, 1799/1808). In recent years, a total of eighteen additional chamber and piano compositions (three collections of six works each) have come to light in different private collections, but all displaying the same handwriting. These are not autographs, but rather copyist’s manuscripts that are however undoubtedly to be attributed to the composer’s circle. It is very possible that they were commissioned by him to be offered for sale. There is some evidence that Dreyer wrote considerably more chamber music than what is currently known.

Among the group of hitherto unknown works are also the *Six Sonates Concertantes pour le Clavecin ou le Forte-Piano et Violoncelle*, which are presented here for the first time. These are so-called accompanied piano sonatas of the kind composed in large numbers at the end of the eighteenth century. The focus was clearly on the piano, while the string instrument had more of an accompaniment function. In spite of the

formulation “pour le Clavecin ou le Forte-Piano” in the title, the composer probably had the pianoforte in mind, and not the harpsichord. However, it should be mentioned that the pieces can also be performed very well on the modern grand piano. The six sonatas reveal a largely optimistic character, florid melodies, and harmonic lightness, and show that Dreyer was a very skilled practitioner also in the genre of chamber music.

Finally, attention should be called to the annotation “P. v. Beroldingen 86” (the number is possibly to be read as “80”) on the inside of the front cover of the source.



This annotation not only names the original owner of the manuscript, but also contains an indication of the date of origin of the six sonatas, the terminus ante quem, so to speak. The former is the cello-playing lawyer Paul Joseph Baron von Beroldingen (1754–1831), who was in the service of the Princely Priory of Ellwangen and elevated in 1800 to the status of imperial count.

In 1803 he entered the service of the state of Württemberg and ended his career as the Queen’s *Obersthofmeister* (Lord Chamberlain) and as a member of the Württemberg assembly of the estates. The number after the owner’s mark presumably indicates the year in which Beroldingen acquired the sonatas. This would mean that Dreyer composed them by 1786 at the latest.

Günther Grünsteudel
Augsburg, November 2014

Our Edition

The manuscript of these six sonatas is made up of two partbooks: *Cembalo* (harpsichord; 59 pages) and *Violoncello* (22 pages). The title page of the harpsichord part reads: *Six Sonates Concertantes pour le Clavecin ou le Forte Piano et Violoncelle Composeè et Dedie* [blank line] *Par J. M. Dreyer*. The manuscript is part of the Alfred Lessing Collection (Düsseldorf), today the Cello-Library Alfred Richter (Switzerland).

Our edition, which has been prepared for practical use, follows the manuscript very closely, but with the following qualifications: In the cello part, we have replaced the octave treble clef with tenor clef, which is more common today. Moreover, in Sonata I there is a particularly high passage that we have notated in normal treble clef. The accidentals in our edition are valid for the whole measure, as is usual today. Editorial accidentals that deviate from the manuscript are given in parentheses. The few alterations to the musical text are indicated in the score by footnotes. The dynamic marks have been standardized; markings added by the editors are given in square brackets. Editorial slurs are given as dashed lines. The frequently occurring abbreviations *Allo* and *Alló* have been replaced by *Allegro*.

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This publication was made possible by the kind support of the Cello-Library Alfred Richter (Switzerland). We very much hope that in this way we can awaken Dreyer’s beautiful, hitherto entirely unknown sonatas from their long slumber.

Günter and Leonore von Zadow
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