

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. In the winter of 1758–9 Abel arrived in London, where he soon became known for his performances on the viola da gamba 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 1782. 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

Abel's contemporary, the famous music historian and commentator Charles Burney, remarked that Abel's "invention was not unbounded, and his exquisite taste and deep science prevented the admission of whatever was not highly polished."⁴ This work shows the composer's excellence in crafting satisfying musical creations. His melodies are unfailingly charming and sometimes quite expressive without being as confronting as those of a contemporary such as C.P.E. Bach. There are some pleasant harmonic surprises, such as the sudden appearance of G major within a passage in F sharp minor at bar 49 in the *Allegro*. Each movement is in an early variant of what was to become Classical sonata form. In the faster movements the double bar signifies the end of the exposition, whereas in the *Adagio* this occurs unmarked at bar 17.

This sonata is cast in the slow-fast-fast (SFF) three-movement form which was often used by

composers such as Somis and Tartini in the first half of the century, but which was gradually supplanted by the fast-slow-fast form after about 1760. However, too little is known about the dating of Abel's compositions to conclude from this that it is an early work: he seems to have used both forms at will. In the SFF form the three movements are always in the same key, whereas in the later form the central movement is usually in a contrasting key. Another characteristic of the SFF form is that a fermata which signifies that a cadenza is required is often found at the final cadence in the opening slow movement, as in this sonata.

Led at first by French composers and makers, the popularity of the transverse flute increased throughout the eighteenth century. Since the only source of this work is in Denmark, we cannot say where or when Abel wrote it. Certainly in London, where he spent most of his career, there were many opportunities to purchase flutes, and many method books written for flute players. With its range of just over two octaves, this work is playable on the most common form of Baroque flute in D and is in the most comfortable key for this instrument. It is easily playable on the violin, but as a flute piece, does not require the use of the G string.

Vivace is a popular tempo marking for sonata final movements by Abel and many of his contemporaries, and it is today probably the most misunderstood eighteenth-century tempo marking. Whereas the famous Maelzel metronome, and the understanding of modern musicians, place *Vivace* as a tempo considerably faster than *Allegro* and only one step below *Presto* in speed, in the eighteenth century this was not the case. Those historical treatises which give a hierarchy of tempo markings invariably place *Vivace* as slower than *Allegro*. In Abel's case these *Vivace* finales are almost always based on the minuet, as in this sonata. In this movement the first subject area of 16 bars is divided into the two- and four-bar phrases which are typical of the minuet; but having established that dance type, Abel allows himself to diverge from those strict phrase structures to enable a more flexible and substantial sonata movement.

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

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

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

⁴ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (London 1776–1789), vol. 4, p. 680.

C.P.E Bach wrote that appoggiaturas, irrespective of their notated length, are played on the beat and take half or two thirds of the value of the following note, but also that there was an increasing tendency to notate them at the correct length. In this work the first part of this statement applies, whereas the second often applies, but not always. Passages of falling thirds, such as in bar 3 of the *Adagio*, are often decorated by a different type of ornament borrowed from the French, the *Tierce coul e*. The general consensus of the historical treatises is that these are played short, lightly and before the beat.

Michael O’Loughlin
Brisbane, Australia, June 2019

Our Edition

The present edition is based on a manuscript which is found in the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen with siglum and shelf number **DK-Kk mu 6210.0832**. The caption title on the manuscript

reads *Sonata* on the left side and *Del Sigr Abel* on the right. An instrumentation is not indicated. The music is notated as a two-part score, the bass is unfigured. The manuscript is part of a music collection of 95 pages containing flute sonatas of several composers.⁵ Therefore we conclude that our work is also a flute sonata.




The sonata is not listed in Walter Knappe’s Abel catalogue.⁶ Also, there is no concordance to other works by Abel, so that we assume that this work is published here for the first time. The manuscript is very well legible and basically error-free, so that our edition follows it very closely. The notes are free of editorial amendments, the few places that we have modified nevertheless are listed in the Critical Report. We want to thank Michael O’Loughlin for his introduction and Dankwart von Zadow for his continuo realization and figuring.

G nter and Leonore von Zadow
Heidelberg, June 2019

Kritischer Bericht *Critical Report*

Wir vermerken die Schreibweise des Originals, wenn diese von unserer Edition abweicht. T1 = Takt 1, N1 = Note 1

We indicate the original reading, if it differs from our edition. T1 = bar 1, N1 = note 1

Allegro non molto T3 B	
Allegro non molto T30 F1	
Allegro non molto T30 B	

⁵ The collection belonged to Werner Hans Rudolf Rosenkrantz Giedde (1756–1816).

⁶ Walter Knappe, *Bibliographisch-thematisches Verzeichnis der Kompositionen von Karl Friedrich Abel (1723–1787)* (Cuxhaven 1971).