

Introduction

Abel's Biography and Legacy

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. Probably in 1755, Abel embarked on a long and poorly documented journey, although we do know that he visited the Goethe household in Frankfurt. He arrived in London some time before 5 April 1759, the date of his first concert there. Abel 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. 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 there, 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"¹ and over 20 years later Goethe remembered him as "the last musician who handled the viola da gamba with success and applause."² 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."³

Abel's formative years coincided with the "new simplicity" or *galant* revolution: counterpoint became less significant, melody became simpler, and symmetry gained significance at all levels, from motives and phrases to entire movements. Unlike today, the public wanted new music; but like today, they wanted to be able to understand and respond to

it without too much effort. The new style was driven by Italian opera and symphony composers. Abel's colleague J. C. Bach would have learned it during his seven years working in northern Italy. Abel never went to Italy, but his first position was as a member of the Dresden court orchestra, which was directed by Johann Adolph Hasse, who had studied and worked successfully in Italy, and brought the Italian style back to Dresden.

Perhaps no eighteenth-century composer is now in as much need of a reassessment as Abel. The forthcoming catalogue of his works⁴ will contain about 400 entries, of which only 233 are listed in the 1971 catalogue by Walter Knappe.⁵ Apart from the works for viola da gamba, the newly discovered works mainly have been found in various German collections, and are thought in general to date from Abel's early years in Germany, before he left for London. Abel was prolific in the three most significant instrumental forms, symphony, concerto and sonata, and also wrote many short single-movement pieces. The concerto is the least represented instrumental form, with 29 works, not all of which have survived. There are eleven surviving flute concertos, making it his most favoured concerto solo instrument; his other concertos are for keyboard, violin, cello, horn, viola da gamba, and oboe.

Abel's Concerto Form

In 1711 Vivaldi published his famous collection of concertos, *L'estro armónico*, op. 3. These revolutionary works became the model for successive generations, especially German composers, and their influence can be traced through to Mozart's mature concertos. It is easy to see how Abel, immersed in the Italianate style of the Dresden court orchestra, became an early adopter of the new form. The Germans were generally less flexible in their interpretation of the genre than Vivaldi himself. They adhered strictly to the now familiar three-movement form, in which two outer fast movements in the tonic key flank a central slow movement in a related

¹ Cited in Walter Knappe, Murray R. Charters and Simon McVeigh, "Abel, Carl [Karl] Friedrich", *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy [http://www.grovemusic.com].

² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit*. (München: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1961).

³ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (London 1776–1789). Qtd in Knappe, Charters and McVeigh.

⁴ Günter von Zadow, *Catalogue of Works of Carl Friedrich Abel (AbelWV)*, forthcoming, planned for 2023.

⁵ Walter Knappe, *Bibliographisch-thematisches Verzeichnis der Kompositionen von Carl Friedrich Abel (1723–1787)* (Cuxhaven, 1971).

key. Each movement is built on the ritornello principle: the movement commences and ends with a ritornello comprising a strong statement of one, or usually more, themes by the full orchestra, contrasting with the intervening solo sections or episodes, in which the soloist is accompanied much more lightly. The most generally popular variant has four ritornellos and three solos, but in the outer Allegro movements, Abel often employs the five-ritornello, four-solo form. An important structural characteristic of the form as employed by Abel and most of his contemporaries is that the ritornellos are harmonically stable, while the episodes provide the necessary modulations away from, and then back to the tonic. Solos will be interrupted by orchestral interjections of brief motives from the ritornello.

It is worth emphasising that Abel and his compatriots used the ritornello form for all three concerto movements. These movements are not in sonata form, but irrespective of the number of sections, they can be notionally mapped against the three large parts of that form. The first part, or exposition, comprises the first ritornello and the first solo, which modulates to the dominant or the relative major. The central part would become the development in sonata form, but here there is no working over or developing of the themes presented in the exposition. Instead, new and contrasting ideas are introduced. As in a development section, it is here that the harmony reaches its greatest distance from the tonic; but in Abel's concertos that is not very far, usually the minor third or sixth degree in a major-key movement. The recapitulation usually occurs at the second-last ritornello in both four-ritornello and five-ritornello forms; after this, the harmony remains bound to the tonic.

Theorists of the later part of the eighteenth century give two distinct and potentially conflicting purposes which the concerto serves: to show the virtuosity of the soloist, and to depict a dialogue between two different characters. Heinrich Christoph Koch's rhetorical ideal describes Abel's concertos well. He makes a rather beautiful and very appropriate analogy with the ancient Greek tragedy,

"... where the actor expressed his feelings not to the audience but to the chorus, which however became involved in the action down to the last detail, and at the same time had the right to take part in the expression of feelings."⁶

Abel and the Flute

Early in the century the flute became one of the most popular instruments among amateur musicians. Tutor books and music were published in France and England, and soon after, in Germany. Again, Vivaldi played a significant role with his six flute concertos op. 10, published in Amsterdam in 1729. In Dresden Abel would have known the flautist Pierre-Gabriel Buffardin, an import from France and a star of the court orchestra, and his student Johann Joachim Quantz. Dresden *Kapellmeister* Hasse was mainly celebrated for his successful operas, but almost all of his instrumental music is for flute, including dozens of concertos. In the 1740s the flute must have gained a major boost in Germany through the endorsement of the Prussian King Frederick II (the Great), an enthusiastic and very competent amateur flautist. Frederick appointed Quantz as his private flute teacher, flute maker and supervisor of his private concerts at a very high salary in 1741.

Flutes were made in three or four sections, with a conical bore and a single key for D sharp, though Quantz experimented with separate keys for D sharp and E flat, the latter being somewhat higher in pitch in all temperaments except equal.

Cadenzas

In all three movements of this concerto, at the end of the final solo section, there is a fermata marked over a six-four chord. As always, this signals the need for an improvised or prepared cadenza at this point. As with many aspects of eighteenth-century music, our most informative source of information on the cadenza is provided by Quantz.⁷ It is worth remembering that despite its title, Quantz's book is a treatise for the amateur not just on flute playing but also on all aspects of performing, understanding and appreciating music. The chapter on cadenzas gives advice for both singers and instrumentalists. After stating twice that cadenzas have developed through free inspiration and without rules, Quantz proceeds to give a quite alarming number of rules for constructing them. The most famous of these is that singers and wind players must complete their cadenza in one breath, whereas cadenzas for stringed instruments can be as long as the player wishes, although here also, short and sweet is better

⁶ Koch, Heinrich Christoph, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition*, 3 vols (Leipzig: Böhme, 1782–93, facs. rep. Hildesheim: Olms, 1969), p. 332.

⁷ Quantz, Johann Joachim, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly, 2nd ed (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), Chapter 15.

than long and annoying. Quantz also says that cadenzas are appropriate only in slow movements or serious fast movements; he gives a list of unsuitable fast movement time signatures, which includes every one except C and 4/4. In most cases this would exclude the last movement, but here Abel has chosen to include one. Quantz also advises that the cadenza should flow from the main *affect* of the movement, and include some of the pleasing melodic ideas of the movement.

This concerto

For the **first movement**, Abel eschews the customary Allegro family of tempo markings (Allegro, Allegro Moderato, Allegro non Troppo, etc.) in favour of Tempo Moderato. For the soloist, a singing quality is more important here than virtuosity. The movement has five ritornellos which decrease in length until the final one (bar 134), which is a shortened repeat of the first, omitting the first subject. While many German ritornellos are formed by an accretion of many short motives, the opening ritornello has just three themes. The first is typically *galant*, a flowing melody involving triplets contrasted against dotted rhythms. This is the only ritornello theme which appears in the solo sections. The second theme (7) quite idiosyncratic, with its Scotch snap rhythms and sudden octaves, before resolving into typical *galant* triplets. The third theme (13) has two faces: it is introduced gently in piano dynamic, but appears later as a forte interruption in the solo (30). The transition into the first solo is also marked forte. This is not a new dynamic, but simply a return to the default dynamic for ritornellos. The first solo (23) starts with the first theme, carefully adjusted to keep it in more brilliant second octave, but almost immediately diverges into new and mellow melodic ideas.

The **second movement**, in A minor with four ritornellos, shows that Abel was a skilled professional composer: its melody is free-flowing and expressive, but it is formally tightly controlled. The first ritornello of twelve bars comprises a single long and expressive theme of seven bars, followed by a five-bar codetta. The second ritornello (32) contains only the seven-bar theme in C, the relative major. The third and fourth ritornellos (61, 78) form

a repetition in the tonic of the first, but they are interrupted at the crucial seven-bar point by the third solo (68), after which the fourth ritornello, a repetition of the codetta mentioned above, closes the movement. The first solo (13) presents two subtle variations on the theme followed by a modulatory transition, but the other two solos maintain the affect of the movement, but with new thematic material. Using a Baroque model, Abel conveys the Classical ideals of bounded novelty, contrast and uncertainty within a secure framework.

The **third movement** is a typical Abel concerto finale, comprising five ritornellos and four solos. The ritornellos decrease in length until the final one, which is a repetition of the first, omitting its opening theme, which is made up of five chirpy little detached cells of a few notes each. At the first solo Abel merely casts a quick glance of recognition at the first subject, repeating only the first two notes before diverging. This is however enough to establish a reference to the rather minimalist theme.

As always with Abel and his German contemporaries, appoggiaturas are ubiquitous and essential to the style. It is worthwhile to consider the quite clear and relevant instructions on appoggiaturas from Quantz and C.P.E. Bach: they are played on the beat, taking time from the following note; if the note is dotted, the appoggiatura takes two-thirds of its value.⁸ Both authors mention the special case where a note with an appoggiatura is followed by a rest. Here, the appoggiatura takes the value of the main note, and the main note is moved into the rest, thereby abolishing it. This type of appoggiatura is found in all three movements of this concerto. This last rule seems difficult to accept for many musicians, and as always, its observance or not is up to the performers. Quantz also mentions the “continuous appoggiaturas” “die durchgehenden Vorschläge” which are found between falling thirds, such as in bars 69 and 71 of the first movement. These, writes Quantz, come originally from the French taste (*tierce coulée*), and are therefore to be played short, lightly, and before the beat. Irrespective of context or type, all appoggiaturas are slurred to the following note.

⁸ Quantz, Chapter 8. Bach, Carl Philipp Emanuel, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William J. Mitchell, (London: Cassell, 1949), Chapter 2, Part 2.

Conclusion

It is no coincidence that the name Mozart has appeared in this introduction. During his time in London, Mozart copied Abel's Symphony in E flat, op. 7 no. 6, which was long thought to be Mozart's own work. Abel's style shows surprising similarities to Mozart's: above all, the apparently endless resource of charming melodies. With their skilful use of passing dissonances, many of Abel's melodies are quite similar to Mozart's. As an innovator, neither composer ranks with the older C. P. E. Bach or the younger Beethoven, and Abel even less so than Mozart. Both composers have a charming facility to introduce new and unexpected themes into their development and solo sections. In the area of harmony, Abel is again the more cautious composer, rarely venturing outside the circle of closely related keys. This is not meant to suggest that Abel is merely a pale imitation of Mozart. Like any significant composer, he has some aspects in common with his contemporaries, and some which are uniquely his own; and all of them are well worth finding and enjoying.

Michael O'Loughlin
Brisbane, February 2022

Our Edition

The source of this concerto can be found in the music library of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin, which is kept in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv. The RISM siglum and shelfmark are **D-Bsa SA 2668**. The source is a very neatly and almost error-free written full score of 24 pages in landscape format. There is no other source of this concerto, and it is published here for the first time. Walter Knappe did not know it, it is not included in his work catalogue.⁵ In the planned new catalogue of works⁴ it is listed under AbelWV F15.

This source is part of the important music collection of Carl Jacob Christian Klipfel (1727–1802). It was written by him personally. This amateur musician and collector from Meissen was a friend of Frederick the Great and later became co-director of the Royal Porcelain Manufactory in Berlin.⁹ Meissen is near Dresden and was strongly influenced by the concert life there. This concerto was therefore most likely composed during Abel's time in Dresden, or at least before his departure for London in 1759. A total of four of Abel's flute concertos have survived in the Klipfel collection, all of which can only be found here. In addition to this concerto, two others from this collection appear in a new edition.¹⁰ The fourth is a fragment only.

Our edition follows the source very closely. In the orchestral parts we have standardised and completed the articulation to facilitate rehearsal work. We have left the solo part in the urtext. All our amendments and additions are listed in the Critical Report on p. XII or marked as usual: slurs and ties are dotted, other additions are in square brackets. Accidentals differing from the source are in brackets and warning accidentals are not specially marked.

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Günter von Zadow
Heidelberg, February 2022

⁹ Nigel Springthorpe, „Porcelain, Music and Frederick the Great: a Survey of the Klipfel Collection in the Sing-Akademie, Berlin“, *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, vol 46, no 1, p. 1–45.

¹⁰ Abel, *Concerto E-Moll Flauto Traverso Concertato* (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2022), G390; Abel, *Concerto G-Dur Flauto Traverso Concertato* (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2022) G394.