

Carl Friedrich Abel
Pieces for Viola da Gamba
Ralph Rousseau



trotk

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Sonata in D major

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------|
| 1 | Moderato | 2:59 |
| 2 | Adagio (WKO 187) | 3:34 |
| 3 | Rondo - Vivace (WKO 205) | 3:57 |

Sonata in D minor

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------|
| 4 | Allegro (WKO 208) | 4:42 |
| 5 | Adagio (WKO 209) | 4:36 |
| 6 | Tempo di minuet (WKO 207) | 2:16 |
| 7 | Allegro | 3:35 |

Sonata in A major

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|------|
| 8 | Allegretto (WKO 211) | 3:39 |
| 9 | Adagio (WKO 199) | 2:21 |
| 10 | Presto (WKO 212) | 1:35 |

Sonata in D minor / D major

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|------|
| 11 | Arpeggio (WKO 205) | 1:50 |
| 12 | Fuga (WKO 196) | 3:34 |
| 13 | Adagio (WKO 189) | 3:26 |
| 14 | Allegro (WKO 195) | 1:53 |

Sonata in D major

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|------|
| 15 | Andante (WKO 191) | 3:32 |
| 16 | Tempo di minuet (WKO 200) | 2:57 |



Carl Friedrich Abel (1723 – 1787)

Sic transit gloria mundi.

Having been a true celebrity in the second half of the 18th century, Carl Friedrich Abel has since been largely forgotten. At least, forgotten outside of the viola da gamba community. He was a cellist, composer, and viola da gamba virtuoso, most well-known for his establishment and subsequent managing, together with a son of the great J.S., Johann Christian Bach, of the appropriately-named and extremely successful Bach-Abel concert series in London. Between 1764 and the untimely death of Johann Christian in 1782, this series defined the musical world of London. Abel was sharing a house with Johann Christian at the time and the two must have been extremely close. Abel was devastated by the death of his friend, and turned to alcohol and his fatherland for consolation. Both without success.

Even though his performances on the viola da gamba continue to receive high praise in the London press right up until his death in 1787, Abel more and more relied on spirit drinks to perform on stage after the passing away of Johann Christian. He was reputedly sometimes in such a state that two men were needed to carry him onto his chair before the concert. This apparent loss of control notwithstanding, he then proceeded -according to the papers- to improvise more beautifully than ever before.

With the Bach-Abel series coming to an end in 1782, Abel returned to his fatherland for inspiration and in order to be introduced to the latest musical fashion. He composed several sonatas in the Berlin style of the time before returning to London, where he died a few years later. The French Revolution was then only two years away. The viola da gamba had gone almost completely out of fashion. The contemporary papers concluded, that with the death of Carl Friedrich Abel, the viola da gamba was in effect buried alongside him. It would indeed be 150 years before both the instrument and Abel's music would again find recognition.

How did the son of cellist Christian Friedrich Abel and Anna Christina Holm, born in

Cöthen on December 22, 1723, become an international celebrity in the far-away city of London? J.S. Bach had just left Cöthen for Leipzig at the time of his birth, but the two families were very friendly and it is even assumed that the famous suites for violoncello solo were actually composed for Abel's father. It is also probable that Bach assisted in establishing Abel's musical career, since Abel was living in Leipzig in the late 1730s, after the death of his father.

It is certain that Abel was employed as a cellist by the Dresdener Kapelle and he gradually moved into composing as well, publishing his works from 1750 onwards. But in 1757 disaster struck, as Dresden was almost completely destroyed during the Seven Year War between Prussia, Saxony, and Austria. Abel became a European refugee, travelling to Frankfurt am Main, where he reportedly spent some time with the family of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, before moving on to Paris and eventually to London. He may have been just in time to witness Händel's last performances. It was his encounter with Johann Christian Bach that turned Abel's luck around, at least for a decade and a half.

It was during the early years of the Bach-Abel concert series that Karl Friedrich received a visit by Leopold Mozart, showing off his prodigy offspring. Indeed, the young Wolfgang Amadeus received music lessons from the great Abel. Mozart apparently used some themes by Abel in his 18th symphony, and it is even rumored that Mozart did in fact compose some works for the viola da gamba during his stay in London. Just imagine that: actual notes for the viola da gamba by Mozart. What a tantalizing idea! What a dream for any viola da gamba player! And what a deception that these works -if they ever existed- have never been found.

Even though Abel left behind a sizable oeuvre, including many symphonic works, he is maybe best remembered for his extraordinary compositions for the "queen of all instruments", as he called it: the viola da gamba. Every viola da gamba player is familiar with some of his work. Many of us have started our education with the easy pieces with basso continuo, gradually moving to the extremely demanding and rich repertoire for solo viola da gamba. It is this repertoire that is recorded

on this album. It is so special to be able to record these sweet, emotional, deeply moving, and elegant pieces, since it is through this music, more even than by means of the works of Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach, that one hears the new era approaching, the era of romanticism. The works of Mozart for the viola da gamba may never be found. But by playing and listening to the music of Abel, one gets a glimpse of what it may have sounded like.

For me, Karl Friedrich Abel will always remain the Mozart of the gamba.

The music on this album

The pieces on this album have not been arranged in sonatas by Abel himself. The separate and unnumbered pieces have been preserved in a number of manuscripts, for example the *27 sonatas senza basso* present in the New York Public Library Music Department. This facsimile, albeit dated post-mortem (1801) is the basis of the performances on this album. Several editions of the pieces are present, e.g., the Dovehouse Edition (ed. Murray Charters), and the groundbreaking work of Walter Knappe (*Erste Gesamtausgabe der Kompositionen Karl Friedrich Abels in Partituren*, Cuxhaven 1959-1974).

However, both the manuscript and the editions contain errors, inaccuracies, and interpretations. It is therefore necessary for the performers to sometimes make their own choices. This is complicated by the fact that the absence of a basso continuo part makes harmonic triangulation impossible. Sometimes one really can only make educated guesses.

The ordering of the music in sonatas has been performed by me, drawing inspiration from the work of Walter Knappe but relying on my own taste to make the final decisions, sometimes adding tempo indications. I can only hope to have captured Abels intentions in this manner. I have indicated the WKO catalogue numbers wherever I could trace them.

A few words on the instrument and bow

The 6-string viola da gamba used in this recording was originally made by the Augsburg "Geigen- und Lautenmacher" (i.e., luthier) Georg Aman in the early 18th century. It has, as many of its kind, a very checkered history, exemplified by the different labels inside the instrument body. It was converted into a small violoncello in the 19th century by a luthier in Konstanz, Germany. The holes for the four pegs can still be seen on the present instrument, as well as the hole for the endpin. It may well be that it was this conversion to the more popular cello that saved the instrument from almost certain oblivion, for at the time of the conversion, the numerous woodworm holes on the back and sides of the body have been painstakingly repaired as well. About 150 years later, in 1963, the neck of the instrument was replaced and it was thus restored to its original condition of six string viola da gamba, the sound of which is captured on this recording. I would like to thank Floris-Jan van der Voort for helping me to eliminate a very persistent and extremely nasty rattle that was probably caused by one of the many reparations. We got rid of it just days before the recording.

Since the contemporary bows are usually not in playing condition anymore, the particular bow that was used for this recording was constructed by my good friend and expert bow maker Gerhard Landwehr.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to Brendon Heinst for his professionalism and patience during the recording (and the photos!), to Hans Erblich for this excellent job on the editing, to the people from "De Oude Jan" in Velp, and of course to my biggest fan and love of my life, Lydia de Korte.

This album is dedicated to the memory of my mother.

Ralph Rousseau, October 2023





In the heart of what we do lies a simple truth: music should be felt as much as heard. Our label is founded on the idea that the purest form of listening replicates the magic of a live performance. It's not about grandeur; it's about authenticity, about capturing the essence of the moment when music comes alive.

With each recording, we try to craft an auditory journey, where the walls of your listening space dissolve to reveal the vaulted grandeur of a concert hall, the sacred quiet of a church, or the intimate warmth of a studio. Our role is that of a careful curator — we blend into the background, allowing the artists and the space to speak through the music.

We choose artists who resonate with this philosophy: musicians who inspire us not just with their talent, but with their drive to push boundaries whilst maintaining a heartfelt connection to their audience. It's this balance that guides our collaborations and helps us fulfill our pledge to bring forth recordings that honour the integrity of high fidelity sound, and the essence of musical storytelling.

At TRPTK, we quietly step back and let artistry take the spotlight. We're here to capture rather than enhance, and to deliver not just the sound, but the very soul of the music to you.

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads 'Brandon Heintz'.

founder & senior recording and mastering engineer

Equipment used on this recording

Microphones

Josephson C617 with Microtech Gefell MK221 capsules *main mics*

Josephson C42 *height mics*

Microphone preamplifiers

Grace Design m801mk2

AD/DA conversion (11.2MHz 1bit)

Merging Technologies Hapi mkII

Merging Technologies Anubis

Grimm Audio CC2 *master clock*

Weiss Engineering Saracon *samplerate converter*

Monitoring

Grimm Audio LS1be *main loudspeakers*

Grimm Audio SB1 *subwoofers*

KEF LS50 Meta *height loudspeakers*

Hegel C55 *amplifier*

Cabling

Purecable Optimus Link *microphone cables*

Purecable Optimus Power *power cables*

Grimm Audio TPR XLR *microphone cables*

Grimm Audio TPR8 *breakout cables*

Tuning

Pura Power Supplies the Dodo *linear power supply*

Pura Power Supplies the Sauroпода *line conditioner*

Pura Power Supplies the Nautilus *power distributor*

Computer Audio Design GC3 *ground conditioner*

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Credits

Recording & mastering engineer: Brendon Heinst

Editor: Hans Erblisch

Cover photography: Filip Naudts

Booklet photography: Brendon Heinst

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Recording format: 11.2MHz 1bit in 5.1.4-channel immersive

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