

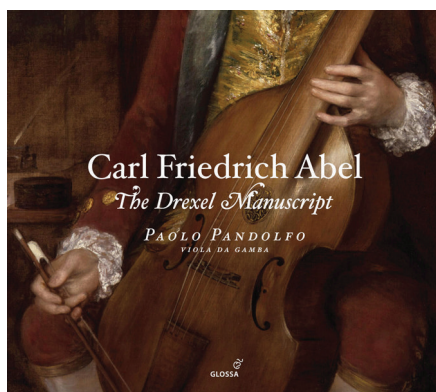
GCD 920410

New release information

December 2008

# Carl Friedrich Abel

## The Drexel Manuscript



**Carl Friedrich Abel**  
**The Drexel Manuscript**

**Paolo Pandolfo, viola da gamba**

**Glossa GCD 920410**

1 CD – digipak

### Programme

Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-1787)  
The Drexel Manuscript

01-10

I. Suite in D major  
(Prélude) – Allegro – Vivace – Andante –  
(Allegro) – Adagio – (Tempo di Minuetto) –  
(Aria) – Tempo di Minuet – (Minuetto)

11-16

II. Suite in D minor  
(Arpeggiata) – (Minuetto) – Allegro – Adagio  
– (Allegro) – Tempo di Menuet (D major)

17-26

III. Suite in D major  
(Prélude) – Allegro – (Allegro) – (Aria con  
Variazioni) – Fuga – Adagio – Tempo di Minuet  
– (Petit Prélude) – Tempo di Menuet – (Minuetto)

27-28

IV. Two pieces in A major  
Allegretto – Allegro

Total playing time 79:28

### Production details

Recorded at Église de Franc-Waret, Belgium,  
in February 2008  
Engineered and produced by Manuel Mohino  
Executive producer: Carlos Céster  
Design: Valentín Iglesias  
Booklet essay: Paolo Pandolfo  
English - Français - Deutsch - Español



8 424562 20410 2

### NOTES (ENG)

The fame that he enjoyed in his lifetime clearly hasn't served Carl Friedrich Abel well in the two centuries since his death. He was fêted all over Europe both for his supreme skills as a performer of the viola da gamba as well as for the quality of his compositions, and was responsible (along with J.C. Bach) for setting up arguably the first series of subscription concerts in the history of Western music, the "Bach-Abel-Concerts". Even the prodigy that was Mozart benefited from Abel's teachings (and was claimed as the composer of one Abel's own symphonies).

All this was known by keen minds of the time such as Charles Burney, J.F. Reichardt and Goethe and fortunately also, in the 21st century, by Paolo Pandolfo, who delivers here a scintillating rendition of Abel's ever-inventive music which ranges across Preludes, Adagios and sundry dance forms. Where to place this "late" music for the viola da gamba? Not Baroque and definitely heading in the direction of the classicism of Mozart, Haydn and even Beethoven. Or as Paolo Pandolfo – who adds dabs of his own highly-advanced improvisatory skills here and there – says, "Simply put, it is Music!"

### NOTAS (ESP)

La fama que Carl Friedrich Abel disfrutó en vida no tuvo continuidad en los dos siglos transcurridos desde su muerte. En su tiempo, tanto sus extraordinarias cualidades como intérprete de la viola da gamba como el nivel de sus composiciones fueron celebradas en toda Europa, y junto con J. C. Bach fue responsable de poner en marcha los *Bach-Abel-Concerts*, la primera serie de conciertos por suscripción de la historia de la música. Incluso un prodigio de la talla de Mozart se benefició de las enseñanzas de Abel (y fue durante mucho tiempo considerado el autor de una de las sinfonías del propio Abel).

Todo esto era bien sabido por personalidades de la época como Charles Burney, J. F. Reichardt o Goethe, y afortunadamente ahora, en el siglo XXI, Paolo Pandolfo recoge el testigo y nos ofrece un brillante recital de la música siempre inventiva de Abel, que incluye preludios, *adagios* y diversas formas de danza. ¿Y cómo clasificar esta música «tardía» para la viola da gamba? Desde luego, no es música barroca, y apunta más bien en la dirección clasicista, la de un Mozart, un Haydn o incluso un Beethoven. O mejor, y como dice Paolo Pandolfo –que añade aquí y allá una pincelada de su avanzadísima técnica improvisatoria– en las notas, «Simplemente, ¡es Música!».

### NOTES (FRA)

L'excellente réputation que s'était forgée Carl Friedrich Abel s'estompa au cours des deux siècles qui suivirent sa mort. L'Europe entière avait en effet, durant toute sa vie, célébré son génie, en tant que gambiste et compositeur. Présent sur toutes les scènes, il fonda en compagnie de J. C. Bach les *Bach-Abel-Concerts*, la première série de concerts en souscription de l'histoire de la musique ; son talent de pédagogue était connu au point qu'un prodige de la taille de Mozart étudia avec lui (de fait, Mozart fut longtemps considéré comme l'auteur de l'une des symphonies d'Abel).

L'art de C. F. Abel était reconnu par des personnalités aussi importantes que Charles Burney, J. F. Reichardt ou Goethe, et bien heureusement, en ce début de XXIe siècle, Paolo Pandolfo reprend le relais et nous offre un brillant recital de cette musique si inventive, qui comprend des préludes, des adagios et des danses diverses. Comment classifier cette musique « tardive » pour viole de gambe ? Il ne s'agit pas de musique baroque ; elle semble viser le monde classique, celui de Mozart, Haydn et jusqu'à Beethoven. Ou plutôt, comme Paolo Pandolfo – qui fait montre dans certaines œuvres de sa haute technique d'improvisation – le dit dans son texte: « C'est simplement de la Musique! ».

### NOTIZEN (DEU)

Der Ruhm, den Carl Friedrich Abel zu Lebzeiten genoss, hat ihn in den zwei Jahrhunderten nach seinem Tod leider verlassen. In ganz Europa wurde er sowohl wegen seiner herausragenden Fähigkeiten als Gambist als auch wegen der Qualität seiner Kompositionen gefeiert. Er hat zusammen mit Johann Christian Bach die wohl erste Reihe von Abonnementkonzerten in der Geschichte der westlichen Musik ins Leben gerufen, nämlich die *Bach-Abel-Concerts*. Selbst das Wunderkind Mozart profitierte von Abels Unterricht (und wurde lange für den Urheber einer der Sinfonien Abels gehalten).

All dies war den kundigen Geistern seiner Zeit (wie etwa Charles Burney, J. F. Reichardt und Goethe) sehr wohl bekannt - und zum Glück im 21. Jahrhundert auch Paolo Pandolfo, der hier eine strahlende Wiedergabe der unglaublich erfindungsreichen Musik Abels liefert, die Präludien, *Adagios* und verschiedene Tanzsätze umfasst. Wie soll man diese »späte« Musik für die Viola da gamba einordnen? Sie ist nicht barock und entwickelt sich schon in die gleiche Richtung wie die klassische Musik eines Mozart, Haydn und sogar Beethoven. Oder wie es Paolo Pandolfo (der hier und da Belege für seine eigenen außerordentlichen improvisatorischen Fähigkeiten hinzufügt) es formuliert: »Es ist - schlicht und einfach - Musik!«.

## Paolo Pandolfo on Abel, improvisation and the role of music...

*It seemed that the music of Carl Friedrich Abel was proving singularly impervious to modern performance initiatives. More is known about the life and times of this Köthen-born composer than about his actual music (he can be placed as a pupil of JS Bach and as someone who died in the year of the 17 year-old Beethoven's first visit to Vienna). Yet it was as a virtuosic improviser on the by then (surely?) outdated instrument of the viola da gamba that Abel was equally known for by his contemporaries. So, the most suitable candidate in the 21st century for bringing back Abel's music to its rightful place needs to be not only a supreme interpreter on the viola da gamba and steeped in its repertory but one capable of understanding the almost lost art of improvisation.*

*Justifiable claims to fit those somewhat elevated and demanding conditions can be made on behalf of Paolo Pandolfo. Amongst his recordings for Glossa can be counted interpretations of some of the most challenging compositions that can be played on the gamba (including his own transcription of the Bach Six Cello Suites written, it is believed, for Carl Friedrich Abel's father). And Pandolfo has turned his mental skills also to the activity of improvising: this can be vouchsafed by listening to such discs as Travel Notes and Improvisando as well as through the work he is achieving with students in the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and elsewhere. It was in that Swiss musical hothouse of Basle that Pandolfo was to be tracked down to talk about his new recording; for more about the chequered history of CF Abel and how his manuscript containing solo works for the viola da gamba came to reside in the library of the painter Thomas Gainsborough, Pandolfo's booklet essay is a compelling read.*

### How would you describe the personality of Carl Friedrich Abel?

I believe that Carl Friedrich Abel holds an extremely important place within the repertoire of the viol, one which should be understood much more clearly by modern music lovers as well as by scholars. I believe also that he represents the perfect point of connection between Baroque and Classical music. In the first instance one should consider his deep rootedness in the world of the Baroque. Johann Sebastian Bach must have been for Abel a crucial influence: something between a close family friend (first in Köthen) and a kind of father figure (in the Leipzig years after the death of Abel's own father), as well as a teacher in both periods. Thus Abel has imbibed at the richest source of music knowledge and of artistic deepness that the western world has probably ever offered, in addition at a source of deep humanity - that provided by these two close families, the Bachs and the Abels. He was a son of Christian Ferdinand (one of Johann Sebastian Bach's closest friends, a cello and

viola da gamba virtuoso, for whom Johann Sebastian had written the *Six Cello Suites*) and very soon he must have become an unbelievable virtuoso himself. And in 1758, at the age of 33, as a consequence of the Seven Years War, he walked his way out of the tottering world of the *ancien régimes* "...on foot, with three Thaler and six Simphonies..." to arrive in the modern ambience of London, where he was to spend most of the rest of his life. There he recreated (in some way) a part of that familiar warmth that he had grown up with in Köthen, dividing friendship and professional collaboration with Johann Christian Bach.

### And as a musical figure?

On this new CD I have played a part of what Abel has left as music for the viol, but it would be a mistake to consider Abel simply as a viola da gambist. In fact, as well as being the astonishing viol player and improviser that we can read about in many of the sources, he was fundamentally an extremely well-respected composer. He wrote a significant amount of instrumental music, symphonies, quartets, concertos and so on. I have yet to play his other music but after this experience with the *Drexel Manuscript*, I strongly feel the need to do so: helping an orchestra, for example, in the performance of Abel's symphonies, or his concertos for instrument and orchestra. I do hope there will soon be the occasion, and Basle is definitely the right place for this.

### What have been the experiences for you of playing the pieces from the *Drexel Manuscript*?

Immersing myself in deep contact with Abel's music has been a great experience for me. I felt I was thrown into a completely different world from the one we "viol players" tend to inhabit: no more Baroque suites, no more majestic *allemandes* or refined *courantes*, no court gossip chattering away between *sarabandes* and *gavottes*... This is music for the pure pleasure of the listeners: music for a paying public which likes to spend an evening forgetting about their daily problems, their ears caressed with sweet sounds. Indeed, music for a rich middle class which has achieved that state of wellbeing which not long before only the aristocrats could afford... And what sounds all this is... classical music... on the viola da gamba! The instrument I most had to think of, while I was recording, was, in fact, the fortepiano. The long resonating sounds building suspended phrases, whose notes drop pure as crystal tears as one finds in Mozart's concertos for piano, the harmonies which one only understands once the resonance of more notes is fulfilled... Playing Abel's music has taught me a lot about how an active and lively imagination - along with new artistic and social needs mixed with a true love for the viol - can transform the instrumental and musical vocabulary one has grown up with. Abel respected the viol as a true lover respects his beloved. There was no question of forcing the instrument into the new musical idioms. Nor any sense of competition with the violin or the cello (as we feel in other early Classical era composers for the viol such as Graun). Abel's is the most natural of the approaches: his embodies the

deepest respect for the old and noble nature of the instrument and for its lutenistic origins, and made the viol change into the "perfect classical instrument"!

### You make reference in your booklet notes to the "middle-class ritual of the concert" starting with the Bach-Abel concerts in London. Are the connotations of "middle-class" and "ritual" creative or restrictive for you as an artist in the 21st century?

This involves the crucial, existential questions for any artist of any age: "What am I here for?" "What role can my art have within the society I am living in?" "Can I, with my art, properly 'serve' it, but also at the same time, 'improve' it?" In Abel's time, the higher arts were moving out of the palaces of the aristocrats to enter the middle-class concert rooms and the homes of such people as well. And this "new" format is basically what we have all grown up with. The changing circumstances in Abel's day required all the arts to change in a radical way, in order to be able to speak to the new audiences. Our own time is bringing with it new and radical changes within the world's societies. I believe that all arts have to move and develop once more in order to play an active role within those societies in which we live; in order to "serve" them properly in one sense, but also to "improve" them in other, to bring beauty, dialogue and peace into them. As an artist I cannot say where we are going: today's world seems too complex - huge migrational streams, vast economic changes, scary environmental changes - I simply feel that we should be ready to move on, as Abel did "on foot, with three Thaler and six Simphonies", bringing respect and love wherever life will bring us.

### How have your efforts at developing courses in improvisation been progressing?

For the last couple of years I have been saying that I do think that improvising is a skill that all musicians should start mastering again. Abel was clearly a great improviser, as were Mozart, Brahms, or indeed, John Coltrane! I do my best in order to work in that direction, doing "field work" within my own research, as well as including improvising in my teaching in Basle. Recent experiences also include exciting improvising master classes at the Conservatory in Amsterdam.

### In your teaching in Basle, particularly, what are you looking for from your pupils?

I look for artistic and human stimulation. I hope that the students learn from me - at least as much as I learn from them. There is an idea clearly taking shape also with Glossa, where we would (and should) make use of the unique opportunity of bringing together such good musicians who are in Basle, maybe on a yearly basis, taking them out of the lecture hall and putting them in front of two good Glossa microphones. We'll see!

by Mark Wiggins

© 2008 Glossa Music / MusiContact