

# THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE IN 8 PARTS XVI

CARL FRIEDRICH ABEL

Published by Robert Bremner at the Harp and Hautboy, opposite Somerset-House, in the Strand

Issued: 4 August 1766; price 2 shillings

Source: Henry Watson Music Library – Courtesy of Manchester Libraries,  
Information and Archives, Manchester City Council: BR580Ad34

Instrumentation: 2 violins, viola, basso, 2 oboes, 2 horns [originally in D]

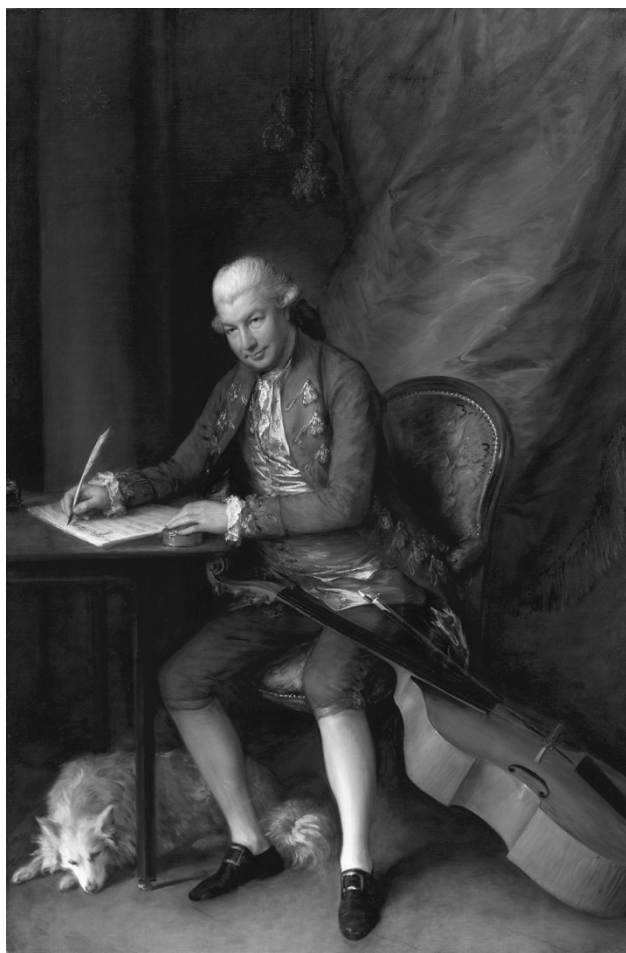
Editors: Barnaby Priest & Alyson McLamore



## COMMENTARY

When printer Robert Bremner (c.1713–1789) presented a symphony in D major by Carl Friedrich Abel (1723–1787) as the *Periodical Overture No. 16*, he most likely had obtained the music directly from the composer, who was living in London at the time. Born into a musical family in Cöthen, Abel developed notable skills on the cello and viola da gamba early on, and in 1743, at age twenty, he was hired to be a player in the Dresden court orchestra, directed by Johann Adolph Hasse (1699–1783). Abel seems to have started composing in that city as well. But the Seven Year's War (1756–1763) brought that chapter of Abel's life to a close: when Frederick the Great began destroying the city, Abel fled Dresden sometime during 1757 or 1758.<sup>1</sup>

In 1759, Abel launched a significant new chapter in his life. He had made his way to London, giving a public concert on 5 April. George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) died just a few days later, and it was perhaps telling that Abel quickly became one of the most influential of the new generation of musicians active in England.<sup>2</sup> In his debut concert, Abel performed on various instruments, including the pentachord. That unusual string instrument had recently been invented by Sir Edward Walpole, and Abel's inclusion of it in the program indicated that he had already started to gain aristocratic support in England. He also became good friends with an avid amateur gamba player who was much more famous as an outstanding painter: Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788). Gainsborough traded paintings and drawings for lessons, music, and even an instrument; the portrait of Abel shown on this page was by Gainsborough.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Tate Britain gallery owns a painting of one of Abel's Pomeranian dogs and her pup, currently on long loan to Gainsborough's House in Sudbury.<sup>4</sup>



Most of the music on the program of Abel's first London concert had been composed by Abel himself, and by April 1760, George II awarded Abel a publishing license. A steady stream of instrumental music followed.<sup>5</sup> Some of that repertory was the fruit of a London subscription concert endeavor begun in the mid-1760s. Abel had linked up with Johann Christian Bach (1735–1782), whom he may have known since

<sup>1</sup> Walter Knappe, and Murray R. Charters; rev. by Simon McVeigh, "Carl [Karl] Friedrich Abel," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 1: 15.

<sup>2</sup> Knappe, Charters, and McVeigh, "Carl [Karl] Friedrich Abel," 15.

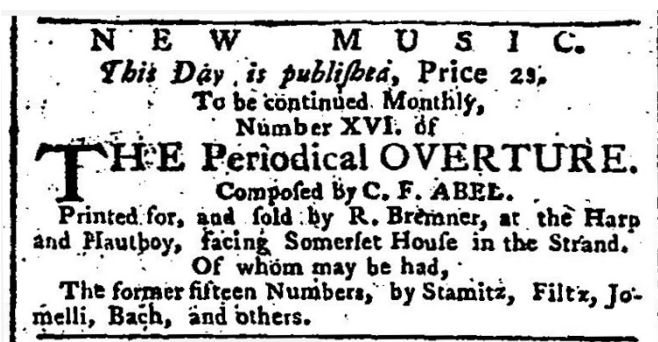
<sup>3</sup> Murray Charters, "Abel in London," *The Musical Times* 114, no. 1570 (December 1973): 1225.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gainsborough-pomeranian-bitch-and-puppy-n05844>.

<sup>5</sup> Charters, "Abel in London," 1224.

childhood; over the years, his family had intersected with the Bachs in various German locales. Two years after Bach's 1762 arrival in England, he and Abel gave a joint public concert on 29 February 1764, and starting the next year, they directed the music in an entire series of performances offered by subscription. Their concerts were initially organized by Theresa Cornelys (1723–1797), but Bach and Abel took over the subscription management in 1768. Although little is known about their specific programming, the two men were known to have written a great deal of the repertory.<sup>6</sup>

It seems probable that the symphony in D major that Bremner published as *Periodical Overture No. 16* originated in the Bach-Abel concert environment. Since Abel wrote relatively little vocal music, it is unlikely



that the work had previously served as an opera overture. Unlike the usual practice of his colleague Bach, Abel does not seem to have also published the work in any continental editions, so the Bremner print is the only known eighteenth-century publication. Still, *Periodical Overture No. 16* had good staying power. Scholar Jenny Burchell has traced at least eight performances of the work at concerts of the Edinburgh Musical Society, starting in 1769 and persisting for at least seventeen years, until 1786. It also appeared on a 1786 program of

the Oxford Musical Society.<sup>7</sup> However, in contrast to the three pieces by Bach that Bremner published, *Periodical Overture No. 16* was the only symphony by Abel that Bremner included in the series.

Abel's symphonies tended to be somewhat less substantial than those of his colleague Bach, but they showed a similar interest in the structures that were becoming the rage in England: an opening movement showpiece, a simpler and lyrical slow movement, and a light-hearted finale.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the observer William Jackson, writing in 1791, felt that Abel had "very successfully" followed the model of Franz Xaver Richter, the earliest of the Mannheim composers to have symphonies performed in England.<sup>9</sup> *Periodical Overture No. 16* is, overall, an excellent illustration of Abel's compositional traits. It features the standard (but not inevitable) "eight parts" of the Bremner series, and its contrasting middle movement shifts to the subdominant key of G major. Lacking repeated sections altogether, it is also one of the shortest of all the *Periodical Overtures*.

The "Allegro" is the most elaborate of the three movements. After an emphatic *tutti* opening chord, the upper strings proceed through delicate upward and downward scalar passages in common time, supported by steady "drum 8ths" in the violas. The accompaniment soon shifts to even more animated measured tremolos (m. 9). The sonata form's refined second theme (m. 23) features a "learned" passage of contrapuntal interplay between the strings, while the closing theme (m. 31) returns to an embellished scalar ascent in the oboes and first violins above vigorous measured tremolos and drum 8ths. The development (m. 38) relies on motifs from the first theme to return the movement to D major at measure 54. The closing theme makes two reappearances during the recapitulation, in measures 75 and 87, framing the return of the contrapuntal second theme at measure 79.

In contrast to the largely conjunct melodies of the first movement, the "Andante" relies on considerably more disjunct motion. It opens at a quiet *piano* dynamic, but jumps to a *subito forte* in the fourth bar. The second theme (m. 12), like the first, contains numerous leaps, but also plays with the contrast between sixteenths in simple subdivision and triplets. The sonata form ushers in the tiniest whiff of a development in measure 20, and both of the themes are shortened during their recapitulation (m. 26 and m. 34).

<sup>6</sup> Christoph Wolff and Stephen Roe, "Bach, Johann (John) Christian," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 2: 415.

<sup>7</sup> Jenny Burchell, *Polite or Commercial Concerts?: Concert Management and Orchestral Repertoire in Edinburgh, Bath, Oxford, Manchester, and Newcastle, 1730–1799*, Outstanding Dissertations in Music from British Universities, ed. by John Caldwell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 311, 314, 330, 342, 345.

<sup>8</sup> Franklin B. Zimmerman, ed., "Introduction: Carl Friedrich Abel," in *Carl Friedrich Abel, 1723–1787: Six Symphonies, Opus 1 / Johann Christian Bach, 1735–1782: Six Symphonic Works*, Series E, vol. II of *The Symphony* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), xiii; Sanford Helm, ed., "Preface," in *Carl Friedrich Abel: Six Selected Symphonies*, vol III of *Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era* (Madison: A-R Editions, 1977), viii.

<sup>9</sup> William Jackson, *Observations on the Present State of Music in London* (Dublin: A. Grueber, J. Moore, J. Rice, W. Jones, R. M'Allister, and R. White, 1791), 16.

Abel employs a sonata form for a third time in the jaunty finale. This “Presto” puts the whole orchestra to work in a unison tonic-chord ascending arpeggiation for the first six bars. Abel also displays the era’s increasing interest in greater orchestral color by giving the oboes the conjunct second theme in harmonized thirds (m. 20); drum 8ths in the second violin and viola provide steady support. The development (m. 43) plays with ostinato-like repeated rhythms before driving to a robust recapitulation of the first theme at measure 64. The transition between themes is even more expansive than it had been in the exposition, and one of its highlights is an orchestral crescendo starting in measure 86, which reflects Abel’s awareness of the orchestral devices that were being popularized by the Mannheim composers. The second theme, again in the oboes, reenters at last in measure 95, while another full-ensemble tonic-chord arpeggiation (m. 118)—this time moving in a downward direction—pulls the movement (and symphony) to an emphatic close.

## EDITORIAL METHODS

*Transposing instruments:* Transposing instruments are written in conventional modern format indicating original key—parts in original keys are available [e.g., Horn I in F (orig. in D)].

*Slurs and ties:* Editorial slurs are indicated using dotted lines; editorial ties are indicated by brackets.

*Triplet/rhythmic grouping indications:* In general, modern practice is followed. Occasionally (especially in slow movements), original subdivisions are used. Where groupings are inconsistently realized in the original source material, modern groupings are adopted.

*Grace notes and appoggiaturas:* These are generally treated as appoggiaturas and are given a value of half the note they precede; in cases where it seems clear that grace notes are intended in the original, a slash is added.

*Alternate notes/ossia passages, etc.:* When a written note is unplayable, an alternative octave substitution is indicated in smaller font and within brackets.

*Accents/articulations/fermatas:* There is considerable inconsistency in articulation throughout the set of periodical overtures. Following the Bremner edition, a wedge is used rather than a staccato mark. In some cases, the printed edition uses wedges and staccato markings within a movement (usually the slow central movement). When this is the case, both marks have been used. Where parallel passages indicate the use of articulations, these have been included between brackets.

*Dynamic markings:* In the original edition, the placement of dynamic marks can be inconsistent within the bar and sometimes across the barline. Where the correct placement of the dynamic is clear from the musical phrasing, the dynamics have been repositioned without comment. Where dynamics are less clear, or missing, the editor’s dynamics occur within square brackets.

*Crescendo/diminuendo markings:* “Cresc.” and “dim.” markings are generally used, but there are rare exceptions to this with the use of hairpins. Where these are editorial, they are enclosed in square brackets. Other markings such as *rinf.* have been retained except where it seems clear that this refers to a crescendo.

*Realization of notational shorthand:* For spacing reasons, some use of notational short-hand has been used. When this is the case, the first full beat has been written out.

*Altered note values:* In the sources, there are occasional errors and inconsistencies in note values. Where these occur, the altered note values are given within brackets.

*Accidentals:* As is standard modern practice, accidentals remain valid until the next barline. This differs from eighteenth-century practice where this convention was not consistently employed. Wherever this is the case, accidentals are added in brackets.

*Figured bass:* Although the eighteenth-century parts usually position the figured bass numerals above the relevant bass notes, the modern score and parts show them below the basso line.

*Missing music:* Where music is missing in the original, alternative sources are sought (e.g., when a bar is missing due to a printer’s error or when music is unreadable). When eighteenth-century concordances are unobtainable, editorial notes are added in smaller font within brackets.

## CRITICAL NOTES

The notation of dynamics and articulation has been standardized throughout. Where these are missing in the original source, they have been reconstructed from parallel passages. These are indicated by the use of dotted slurs and brackets. Where there is inconsistency in the use of staccato articulation marks, the editors have taken decisions based on the collocation of the markings. As is common with music printed in this period, *appoggiature* are inconsistently notated. These have been standardized. Copyist errors have been corrected in brackets (see notes below), along with errors in accidentals. The horn parts have been transposed into F in the score. Metronome marks are a suggestion for performance only. Rehearsal letters, cues in parts, and bar numbers have been added for convenience.

<b>Mvt. 1</b>	<b>Allegro</b>	
m. 72	Ob 1, Ob 2, Vn 1, Vn 2	appoggiatura D5 added to 2nd beat (parallel with m. 73)
<b>Mvt. 2</b>	<b>Andante</b>	
m. 37	VA	1st beat changed to A4 (to maintain harmony)
<b>Mvt. 3</b>	<b>Presto</b>	
m. 19	Hn 1, Hn 2	1st beat changed to quarter note (rhythmic unison with ensemble)
m. 34	Vn 1	appoggiatura C5 added to 2nd beat (unison with Ob 1)
m. 34	Fl 2, Vn 2	appoggiatura A4 added to 2nd beat (parallel with m. 109)
m. 34	Hn 1	appoggiatura E5 added to 2nd beat (unison with Ob 2)
m. 42	Ob 2, Vn 2	appoggiatura A4 added to 2nd beat (parallel with m. 117)
m. 42	Hn 1	appoggiatura E5 added to 2nd beat (unison with Ob 2)
m. 43	Hn 1, Hn 2	1st beat changed to eighth note (rhythmic unison with Ob 1)
m. 47	Hn 2	1st beat changed to dotted quarter note (rhythmic unison with ensemble)
m. 93	Vn 1	appoggiatura F5 added to 2nd beat (unison with Ob 1)
m. 117	Hn 2	1st beat changed to quarter note (rhythmic unison with ensemble)

## CATALOGUE REFERENCES

- RISM A/I A/AA 80 [Répertoire International des Sources Musicales;  
<https://rism.online/sources/990000081>]  
WKO Nr. 44 [Walter Knappe, *Bibliographisch-thematisches Verzeichnis der Kompositionen von Karl Friedrich Abel (1723–1787)* (Cuxhaven, Germany: Verlag des Herausgebers Walter Knappe, [c. 1972])]  
LaRue 7728 (A139) [Jan LaRue, *A Catalogue of 18th-Century Symphonies*, Volume I: Thematic Identifier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)]

## ILLUSTRATIONS

- Abel portrait: Thomas Gainsborough (British, 1727–1788), *Karl Friedrich Abel*, ca. 1777. Oil on canvas, 88 3/4 x 59 1/2 in., frame: 105 × 75 × 7 1/2 in. The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens  
Publication announcement: *The Public Advertiser*, 4 August 1766, p. 1 (courtesy of the British Library Archives)

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ESSAY**

<https://repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de/en/periodical-overtures-details/>



## **PERFORMANCE MATERIALS**

Please contact *Musikproduktion Jürgen Höflich*: <https://musikmph.de/>

