

Anton Eberl (1765–1807), ed. Martin Harlow
SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND FORTEPIANO IN D MAJOR, OP. 20
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After being relegated to obscurity for approximately 160 years following his death, the Austrian composer Anton Eberl has been making a posthumous comeback. Alton Duane White's lengthy dissertation on Eberl's piano works from 1971 seems to have been the starting signal for this rehabilitation ('The Piano Works of Anton Eberl (1765–1807)', PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1971), and several of Eberl's works have since been performed, recorded and broadcast. In the last decade in particular there has been a sharp increase in the number of available editions of Eberl's music, and there is at least one other edition of Eberl's Violin Sonata Op. 20 currently in preparation in addition to the one here under review.

On the face of it, there is much to recommend in Eberl's music. Earlier audiences seem to have considered him to be on a par with his better-known contemporaries: his Piano Sonata Op. 1 was for some time published under Mozart's name, and Eberl's piano works were in his time believed to be in the same league as Beethoven's. Nevertheless, as Martin Harlow plainly demonstrates in the Introduction to this edition, the Violin Sonata Op. 20 was subjected to rather harsh criticism in a review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (AMZ 4/46 (10 August 1803), 763–766), most of which this edition reproduces. Although it is true that Beethoven's compositions received negative criticism in the same publication – the Violin Sonata Op. 30 No. 1, which dates from roughly the same time, probably had the bumpiest reception of all – the sheer harshness of some parts of the review reproduced here can colour the player's initial opinion of Eberl's sonata in a way that is perhaps undesirable. It seems that a more concerted effort to inoculate the audience against some of this criticism might have been appropriate here.

The current reviewer finds himself at considerable odds with his early nineteenth-century colleague from the AMZ, and many aspects that were at the time diagnosed as faults are now what make this sonata stand out. The first movement opens with a deceptively simple theme that is shared between the two instruments. This theme never appears again after the exposition in its initial form: the recapitulation avoids repeating the first twenty-nine bars of the exposition, instead taking up the secondary theme. The AMZ's criticism that the piece lacks unity is probably rooted in the fact that, unlike the opening theme, the secondary theme appears far more loosely composed, and consists of affectively contrasting material ostensibly not presented in a clear order. A closer reading, however, reveals that although the two themes are distinct in their initial presentation, the material that follows their first appearances can be derived from both – a clever compositional trick that Beethoven would later use to great effect in the first movement of his Piano Sonata Op. 57, although there it was not made explicit until the end of the coda. The presence of so much melodic developmental activity in the exposition and recapitulation may also explain the distant keys visited during the actual development, which the AMZ also criticized as a disturbance of unity. Overall, the first movement spends much less time in D major than one would expect, but this is offset by a coda that firmly roots the movement in the home key.

The rather introspective slow movement starts in the relative minor, but moves to A minor by bar 12, a shift that comes with little warning. Initially this passage seems unrelated to what comes before, and the subsequent material in F major also seems disconnected. Over the course of the movement, however, Eberl reveals his reasons for these keys: they are the beginning of a cascade of falling thirds (A minor, F major, D major) that terminates in B minor. At that point, the twelve bars at the start of the movement are revealed to be more a

statement of direction than anything else, and thus this movement can be seen as a step on the road towards progressive tonality. (A somewhat similar approach is taken in Beethoven's Variations Op. 34, in which each successive variation is a third lower. That set was published in April 1803, and therefore might have served as a model for this movement, since Eberl's sonata was announced for publication in July.) Much as in the first movement, Eberl cleverly relates his themes to one another by subtle motivic transformations, and the final B minor section uses this technique to tie the preceding somewhat disjointed sections together.

The third and final movement puts an even greater emphasis on unity, as it teases the listener with the return of a motive from the opening material of the first movement. Tonally, this movement is the most conservative and generally visits keys a fifth apart until it reaches F sharp major/minor about halfway through, after which Eberl limits himself largely to modal changes. The long ending in D major could come across as outstaying its welcome – as it did to the *AMZ* reviewer, who rather heartlessly wrote that 'he should have known to finish earlier' – but an argument can be made that a sonata that visits so many unusual keys in its first two movements could benefit from a movement that anchors the piece in the home key; without it, the whole might have sounded less tonally unified.

Harlow's edition is based on a single source: an edition found in the Biblioteca Musicale Gaetano Donizetti in Bergamo. As is often the case (and as was noted by the *AMZ*), this publication contains quite a few printing errors. These presumably are the reason for the inconsistencies between the parts, which Harlow lists in the textual notes. Generally speaking, the editor resolves these in favour of the piano part, but in at least one case the argument could be made for adopting the indication in the violin part. In the first movement, marked *Allegro vivace*, the source has the violin notated in common time, while the piano is in *alla breve*. The latter contains a fair amount of semiquaver figuration, and to the best of the current reviewer's knowledge this combination of metre and note values is much more frequently found in movements in common time than in the metre in which the music is here presented. Perhaps there is another reason behind this editorial decision, but it is not made explicit. A few inconsistencies that are likely the result of errors in the source could have also been ironed out or explained – compare, for instance, the slurring in the piano part in bars 54–55 of the second movement with other appearances of the same material – but these are easy to spot and of little consequence on the whole.

The editorial method as described towards the end of the Introduction appears to have been intended to produce an edition that is easy for performers to read: cautionary accidentals that appear in the source have only been retained when they clarify passages, and redundant accidentals and unnecessarily repeated dynamics have been removed. These were probably judicious decisions, especially considering the distant keys that the sonata visits with little warning and the high level of detail in articulation already contained in the score. Overall, with the exception of a single modal shift at the end of the exposition that is marked with a cautionary accidental in the violin but not in the piano part, and a few page-turns that could perhaps have been placed more conveniently, the edition is clearly made with performers in mind. For that reason it is rather strange that the notes on performance at the end of the Introduction are so insubstantial, and focus exclusively on small-note ornaments without reference to any literature. Perhaps appropriately, the German translation of the Introduction makes no mention of performance; it translates 'Editorial Method & Notes on Performance' as 'Anmerkungen des Herausgebers'. The general impression one gets is that the whole Introduction could have been substantially expanded, with a much more detailed consideration of the unusual aspects of the work and references to published material on performance practice: both the German and English versions cover only the first dozen lines of the last page, leaving plenty of space that could have been used for this purpose. It should not go unmentioned, however, that Harlow's edition of Eberl's Quintets Opp. 41 and 48

(Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2013) does contain a lengthy section on performance practice that addresses many of these issues.

Some less experienced players may find the lack of fingerings in the piano part somewhat uninviting, but Eberl's writing for both instruments is – some exceptions notwithstanding – fairly comfortable and does not contain the technical extravagance found in some of Beethoven's contributions in this genre. It is therefore easy to believe Harlow's statement that sonatas like Eberl's Op. 20 were largely intended for an amateur market, and many current members of that group who are familiar with earlier sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven will find this publication an interesting change of pace. Music students and professional musicians will also find much of value here, although the lack of performance directions may prove a downside for more junior instrumentalists. Nevertheless, despite some minor faults, this edition constitutes a positive contribution to the wider trend to rehabilitate the compositions of Eberl and other composers who have unfairly fallen through the cracks.

Marten Noorduyn
Marten.noorduyn@music.ox.ac.uk