Introduction

Commentaries on violoncello playing from the first part of the nineteenth century often make the observation that “the violoncello has been rising gradually since the beginning of the last century into estimation, and may now be said to enjoy an almost equal reputation with the violin as a concerto instrument.” Apart from such newly recognized popularity as a solo instrument, appreciation for the violoncello’s “strong, rich, beautiful, and manly tone” accounted for its becoming indispensable to vocal, orchestral, and chamber music accompaniments. While this perception differs little from present evaluations, such remarks by nineteenth-century writers speak to the variety of changes through which the violoncello and the art of performance were transformed in the years previous to their statements.

To describe these multifaceted changes is to recount the history of the violoncello, but history is, after all, about people. An accurate and meaningful account of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century violoncello history therefore becomes the story of a singular group of violoncellists, a description of their lives and the manner in which they made music. The parameters of this story are the years 1740 to 1840. There are several reasons why this period forms a convenient unit for study, but before discussing performance history in detail, a few general comments help to place specific aspects of the violoncello in context. During those years, two threads responsible for an ensuing social reformation became intertwined, those of innovation and nationalism. Both were significant to the development of violoncello performance.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, minds were electrified by new methods of scientific inquiry and innovation. Each decade witnessed changing ideas—induced by an evolving view of how man and his world fit together—in mathematics, science, industrial technology, philosophy, economics, and political thought. The “enlightened” thinking which emerged became an especially pronounced social force among the French, who, in

1 “On the Rise and Progress of the Violoncello,” QMMR, 6, no. 23 (1824), 351.
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The last decade of the eighteenth century, took the concept of political change to revolutionary extremes. Nationalism as a cultural phenomenon was generated as a regional answer to French domination.

Innovation and developing nationalism are reflected to some degree in all of the social and cultural institutions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, including music. The coalescence of innovation and nationalism is particularly discernible in stringed instrument performance. Technological innovations resulted in remarkable instruments coming from the workshops of Stradivari, Bergonzi, Montagnana, Guarneri, and Grancino, to name just a few. Bow making evolved in the families Tourte, Dodd, and Tubbs, and through the work of numerous men who remain forever anonymous. Fomented by violinists’ ever-present desire for increased performance capabilities, alterations to the dimensions and the fittings of instruments and bows continued throughout this entire period. Simultaneously, regional schools of performance evolved in Italy, France, England, Germany, Austria, and the many provinces of Eastern Europe.

Appreciation for the violoncello as a defined entity is discernible from the beginning of the eighteenth century, as playing techniques were gradually liberated from earlier restrictions. Social regard was achieved with much self-satisfaction, the luminaries of each generation convinced that they were the architects of a new age of perfection. The premise that violoncellists were modernist performers was, in part, a self-perpetuating idea traceable to the publication and replication of several articles on violoncello history. The most widely quoted of these was that appearing in J. B. de La Borde’s *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*. This account asserts that the violoncello is the instrument which succeeded the viol for accompanying in concerts. It is made like the violin, except that it is much larger and is held between the legs.

Father Tardieu, of Tarascon, brother of the celebrated maître de chapelle of Provence, conceived it about the beginning of this century; it was equipped by him with five strings...

He made a prodigious fortune with this instrument, which he played very well. Fifteen or twenty years after, he reduced the violoncello to four strings, dispensing with the upper D string.²

Musicologists now consider the violoncello to have evolved, together with other members of the violin family, in the first half of the sixteenth century. Initially, there was little uniformity as to the nomenclature of violoncello-type instruments. In seventeenth-century Italy, alone, there were at least twenty-four differing terms to denote stringed instruments which played in the bass clef, examples being *basso da bracio*, *basso di viola*, *violine*, *violincino*,

and violoncello. Labeling discrepancies are accountable, in part, to variations in the number of strings and tunings utilized. Instruments of the sixteenth century were strung with three to six strings and the tunings generally varied in a combination of fifths and major thirds. Use of four or five strings became the norm in the early seventeenth century, but diverse tunings persisted. Those that were common included $B_b-F-c-g$, $C-G-d-g$, or as mentioned by La Borde, $C-G-d-a-d^1$. $C-G-d-a$ was also favored after 1600 and became standard for four-stringed solo instruments, especially after the introduction of metal-wound strings in the 1660s.

Violoncellists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries knew little about the early use of their instrument and were uniformly convinced that La Borde’s information was correct. From a musical point of view, the development of idiomatic performance repertoire for the violoncello affirmed their premise. Impelled by the advent of metal-wound strings, which then led to the smaller instrument dimensions devised by the luthiers Guarneri and Stradivari, solo works specified for violoncello are found from 1689 onwards. Although almost all such compositions were written for a specific audience and remained in manuscript, the complexity of the music of such composers as Vivaldi and Bach attests to the virtuosity of the performers whom they knew.

Notwithstanding the sophisticated Italian string school of the early eighteenth century, until the fourth decade of the century violoncello technique was dominated by that of the violin and viola da gamba, the latter instrument being much preferred to the violoncello by performers and audiences until this point. However, the influence of Italian string players and the growing demands placed upon the tenor/bass instrumental voice in opera orchestras and in chamber ensembles compelled change. Need for precision of pitch, volume of sound, and matching sonority with other members of the violin family rendered the viola da gamba inevitably unsuitable for much eighteenth-century repertoire. The Italians were the first to recognize this stylistic transition, while musicians in the rest of Europe gradually replaced use of the viola da gamba with that of the violoncello, acceptance of the latter by Parisians being the final death-knell for the viol family.

As musicians became increasingly interested in the capabilities of the violoncello, playing techniques developed to meet performance challenges. Eagerness by players to demonstrate the possibilities of the violoncello resulted in sonatas and concertos for the instrument readily

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multiplying during the 1730s. However, in 1741 the final testimony to the increasing popularity of the violoncello appeared. Discerning that there was now a lucrative interest in the instrument from both professional and amateur musicians, Michel Corrette published his Méthode théorique et pratique pour apprendre en peu de temps le violoncelle dans sa perfection. This French method book signals the advent of the violoncello as a recognized and appreciated performance medium.

The hundred years following the publication of Corrette’s method are replete with a fascinating array of personalities, men whose life’s work was to play the violoncello. The Duport brothers, Boccherini, Bréval, Romberg, Dotzauer, and Merk are all names well known to modern violoncellists. There were many others. Their story unfolds, gleaned from a variety of resources, including contemporary biographies, performance reviews, private diaries, violoncello articles and study methods, and, of course, their music. Study of these sources makes it clear that many violoncellists knew each other, either in person or by reputation. The same sources also make it clear that during this era, individuality in performers was highly regarded and few violoncellists completely agreed with each other as to how the instrument should be played.

They were an enterprising group. Those whose careers encompassed the years before 1789 experimented with the new ideas about bows and instrument fittings and, region by region, worked out how to play the instrument in a way suitable to the changing musical tastes of their audiences. The violoncellists whose careers spanned the years of revolution and war faced greater obstacles. The instability of the times left few of them with any secure employment. Building on the performance techniques devised by their teachers, many of these players were forced to exploit the public concert hall, embracing and embellishing the concept of virtuosity, as approbation by the public superseded that of the nobility as the avenue to success.

The apex of this era of change and growing nationalism is the twenty-five-year period from 1790 to 1815. By 1790, Paris had become the center of a vital school of both violin and violoncello performance. The members of these schools – violinists Viotti, Rode, Baillot, and Kreutzer and violoncellists J. P. and J. L. Duport, Janson, and Lamare – left Paris and spread their doctrines of performance throughout the rest of Europe. They were met in their travels by Germans, the violinist Spohr and the violoncellist Romberg. All of these performers knew the prominent composers Boccherini, Cherubini, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Spontini. Dodging the marching armies that dominated the countryside, these players worked and performed with and for each other in Madrid, Milan, Paris, London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Mannheim, Dresden, Vienna, Munich, Prague, Riga, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. They shared their preferences for in-
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Instrument and bow designs and argued about stylistic concepts and technical methodology. Through this process, the performance techniques which form the basis of modern Italian, English, Spanish, French, German, Bohemian, and Russian string pedagogy came into being.

The years following the Napoleonic Wars witnessed the codification of violoncello performance techniques, as players regained a stable social environment. Aided by a wealth of publications, newly instituted conservatories of music, and easier methods of travel for touring virtuosos, uniformity of both playing techniques and instrument and bow construction becomes increasingly perceptible toward the middle of the nineteenth century. The end of the era is conveniently marked by the death of two of the period’s most influential and publicly acclaimed personalities, Bernhard Romberg and Pierre Baillot, who passed away within a year of each other in 1841 and 1842.

The following pages examine the one hundred years of violoncello performance that falls between the publication of Corrette’s Method and Romberg’s death. It is hoped that this account presents an informative and helpful guide to the technique and performance practices of the period. It is also hoped that the individuality and humanness of the men who made the music has likewise been conveyed. In a present world that grows increasingly international, and thereby more homogeneous as to the manner in which music is studied and performed, distinctive performance styles are gradually vanishing. The degree of diversity present in the playing styles of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century violoncellists may come as an interesting surprise and perhaps a reminder that, while each considered his method to be superior to any other, musicians of this era neither expected nor valued absolute uniformity.
Violoncellists and schools of performance

Familiarity with violoncellists of bygone eras comes to most of us through those learning exercises and favorite pieces taught from generation to generation. These compositions in their re-edited forms usually convey little about the playing characteristics of their authors and nothing about the human qualities of the life which gave them creation. After the close of their careers, most violoncellists simply disappear from view, their playing forgotten and their contributions to violoncello performance obscured by time and changing values. Reacquaintance gives modern players an opportunity to appreciate our custodial legacy. It is also illuminating to compare those career elements which have changed much in musicians’ lives over the course of several centuries with other facets which remain amazingly consistent.

Examining our predecessors’ lives not only teaches us about individuals, but additionally pieces together the puzzle of how national schools formed. These schools constituted the underlying foundation of nineteenth-century performance and, to varying degrees, that of the twentieth century as well. However, their development was not simultaneous nor, before the advent of national conservatories, can schools be identified exclusively by a uniformity of technical mannerisms, for individuality was an accepted and appreciated component of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century violoncello performance. Notwithstanding these factors, playing techniques and approaches to musical style were gradually systematized to suit local conventions, with definable regional methods of performance a result. Often instigated by an individual, favorable political or economic factors were most expeditious to the process, but sometimes there were also arbitrary reasons for an especially gifted or innovative teacher establishing himself in a specific locale. Conversely, if an area ceased to provide an agreeable performance environment, violoncellists took their expertise to more inviting residences.
Violoncellists and schools of performance

ITALY

As with other members of the violin family, the roots of violoncello performance are found in Italy. However, the violoncello did not receive its appellation until the 1660s and semantic vagaries make it difficult to distinguish musicians who specialized in playing violoncello-type instruments before this time. After the term “violoncello” came to be used with some consistency, it is clear that it was performers associated with Bologna who first played a key role in furthering the use of their instrument.¹

Seventeenth-century Bologna was a vibrant cosmopolitan city, supporting one of the most eminent universities in Europe. Two institutions in particular sustained the presence of enterprising violoncellists, the Accademia Filarmonica and the Basilica of San Petronio. Prominent names from the early generations of Bolognese violoncellists include Giovanni Battista Vitali (1632–92), Petronio Franchesini (c. 1650–80), Domenico Gabrielli (c. 1651–90), Giovanni Bononcini (1670–1747), Giuseppe Jacchini (c. 1663–1727), and P. G. Boni (fl. first half of the eighteenth century). Gabrielli’s sonatas date from 1689–90 and are the earliest extant works for solo violoncello.²

Chronology of publications demonstrates that violoncello expertise spread outward from Bologna, first to Modena and Ferrara, and then to other Italian musical centers.³ Significant in the distribution of Bolognese musicians was the dissolution of the orchestra at San Petronio between 1696 and 1701. The migration of Italian musicians became commonplace in the eighteenth century, as the rest of Europe became enamored of Italian singing and string playing. This was a circumstance aggravated by the disjointed political structure of Italy. Unlike other schools of performance, the eighteenth-century Italian school of violoncello was not centered around a single location or player, but encompassed performers who played with a technical and stylistic manner recognized as “Italian” by their contemporaries. Attributes of this style, greatly influenced by opera, included superior technical expertise, attention to melodicousness, and a preference for distinctive compositional forms.⁴

Italian violoncellists were continual instigators in the quest for ever more complex, yet idiomatic playing techniques. However, little of this information is recorded in teaching manuals. The only familiar Italian violoncello methods are Francesco Scipriani’s Princípi da imparare a suonare il Violoncello e con 12 Toccate a solo (before 1753), Salvatore Lanzetti’s Principes

³ Bonta, “From Violone to Violoncello,” 90.
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ou l’application de violoncelle (c. 1756–67), and Pietro Rachelle’s Breve metodo di violoncello (Ricordi, 1837). Instead, the Italian style of playing was dispersed throughout Europe through personal contact and the publication of a large body of performance material. Unfortunately, little is known about the lives of many well-regarded Italian violoncellists, for not only are documented teaching techniques scarce, but the peripatetic nature of most Italian careers meant that – apart from compositions – little but a few anecdotes and recorded fragments survives.

The financial rewards obtainable through eighteenth-century London’s extensive musical life made that city a highly desirable destination for many performers, including numerous Italian violoncellists. Those who left their mark include Giorgio Antoniotti (Antoniotto). Born in Milan in 1692, Antoniotti left Italy at some point for Holland. One of the last Italian composers to write for the viola da gamba, his first opus designates five sonatas for violoncello, with the following seven being for either violoncello or viola da gamba. This set was published in Amsterdam in 1736. He then went to London, but historians vary in their assessment of how long he remained there. Hawkins states that he stayed for only one year, while Fétes asserts that he lived in London for twenty years. In any case, Antoniotti published a treatise on harmony and counterpoint while in London in 1761. The work, first written in Italian and then translated into English, “was subscribed to by all of the principal musicians of the era.” Antoniotti returned to Milan about 1770, where he continued his work on theoretical harmony with Giovanni Sacchi. He died in Milan in 1776.

Giacobbe Basevi Cervetto, born in Italy c. 1682, became one of London’s most prominent performers. He arrived in London between 1728 and 1738, probably making several trips as an instrument dealer before actually settling in the city. Legend states that he bought instruments from Stradivari. Cervetto appeared in many subscription concerts and was a long-time member of the Drury Lane theater orchestra. Although Charles Burney described his tone quality as being rough, numerous anecdotes attest to his personal popularity in London. Cervetto was a well-known acquaintance of the Burney family, playing frequently at soirees held at Burney’s home. Further description by the historian states that the violoncello...
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cellist was “an honest Hebrew, had the largest nose, and wore the finest
diamond ring on the forefinger of his bow hand.”

Consisting of works for use on the violin or violoncello, Cervetto’s first
opus received publication in 1741, while his final “6 Lessons or Diverti-
ments” for two violoncellos appeared in 1761. He was especially successful
as a businessman; he died in London on January 14, 1783, bequeathing
£20,000 to his son.

Giovanni Battista Cirri was born in Forlì on October 1, 1724 and re-
ceived his musical training from local organists. He was ordained into the
church in 1739, but continued a musical career. Leaving Forlì, Cirri went
first to Bologna, where he was attached to the Basilica of San Petronio and,
in 1759, became a member of the Accademia Filarmonica. Having met the
Duke of York in Forlì, he then left Bologna, traveling first to Paris and then
settling in London in 1764.

Cirri remained in London for the next fifteen years, becoming a favorite
of the nobility. He was appointed chamber musician to the Duke of York
and director of music to the Duke of Gloucester. He was also frequently
heard as a soloist in public, taking part in the young Mozart’s concerts in
1764 and 1765, the Bach–Abel concerts, and playing concertos in the inter-
mission at the opera. Being a popular addition to London’s musical scene,
he also participated in concerts at Hickford’s Room and provided music
for the Catch-Club. Cirri published numerous works for chamber ensem-
bles during this period. His older brother fell ill in 1780 and Cirri returned
to Forlì, eventually receiving the position of maestro di cappella at Forlì Ca-
thedral. He died on June 11, 1808.

Salvatore Lanzetti was born in Naples c. 1710. He studied in Naples and
then worked in Lucca and Turin, taking a position in 1727 with Vittorio
Amedeo II. By the latter part of the 1730s, Lanzetti was in Paris and then
London, where he lived until at least 1754. He also made a tour of Ger-
many, giving concerts in Frankfurt am Main in May 1751. He returned to
Italy about 1760 and rejoined the royal chapel in Turin. Lanzetti composed
numerous sonatas and chamber compositions for his instrument, as well as
his pedagogical work. He died in Turin c. 1780.

Several Italian violoncellists established themselves in France. Jean-
Baptiste Canavas (Canavasso) was born in Turin on March 25, 1713. Leav-
ing Italy, he resided in Chambéry, Savoy in the early 1730s, where he was
employed as a land-surveyor for Vittorio Amedeo, Jean-Jacques Rousseau,
also employed in the same capacity, organized chamber recitals in which

The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser, March 3, 1774; March 5, 1774; May 7, 1774; May 10,
1774; May 14, 1774.
Canavas participated over a period of several years. Rousseau mentions that the violoncellist later married and settled in Paris.\textsuperscript{14}

In moving to Paris, Canavas followed his brother and sister. His younger brother, Joseph, was a respected violinist and his sister sang with the Paris opera. Jean-Baptiste became a member of the King’s chapel and, in 1746, was appointed as head of the “Vingt-quatre violons de la Chambre,” the renowned group instituted by Lully. He maintained this position until 1779, when he was pensioned off. He and his brother also played for the opera orchestra until at least 1776. Indicative of the prominence both enjoyed among other Parisian musicians was their membership in the Société Académique des Enfants d’Apollon. Canavas published two sets of sonatas, the op. 1 appearing in 1767 and the op. 2 in 1773. He died in Paris on June 8, 1784.\textsuperscript{15}

Carlo Graziani became part of the musical establishment in both France and Germany. He was born in Asti during the first half of the eighteenth century. Nothing is known of Graziani’s life in Italy. The first recorded incident occurs in Paris, where he participated in the Concert Spirituel in 1747. He obtained a position with the distinguished orchestra of La Pouplinière, employment that lasted until the nobleman’s death in 1762. Granted a ten-year privilege to publish instrumental music in 1758, he brought out his first two sets of violoncello sonatas in Paris.\textsuperscript{16}

Following the dissolution of La Pouplinière’s orchestra, Graziani traveled to England, where he appeared in London with the eight-year-old Mozart at Hickford’s Rooms on May 17, 1764. Another concert given within the same week was with violinist Felice de Giardini.\textsuperscript{17} Graziani is next found in Germany, where he and his wife, a singer, gave concerts in Frankfurt am Main on September 16 and 23, 1770. He and his wife were then invited to Berlin. Graziani succeeded the gambist Ludwig Christian Hesse as violoncello teacher and chamber musician to Prince Friedrich Wilhelm II, while his wife joined the court opera. Graziani, himself, was replaced by J. P. Duport in 1773. Retiring to Potsdam, Graziani died in 1787. His compositions included concertos, sonatas, and incidental works for violoncello, a duo for viola and violoncello, and an aria for soprano with violoncello obbligato.\textsuperscript{18}

The most renowned Italian violoncellist of the eighteenth century was Luigi Boccherini. Born in Lucca on February 19, 1743, Boccherini was a

\textsuperscript{15} Georges Cauceil, La Pouplinière et la musique de chambre au XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1918), pp. 341–346.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 348–349.
\textsuperscript{17} Pohl, Mozart and Haydn in London, vol. 1, pp. 55, 100.