The Cambridge Companion to the CELLO

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Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, musicians were largely dependent for their livelihoods upon either the goodwill of royal or noble patronage or regular employment by a municipality or the Church. A gradual emancipation subsequently took place, due to the growth of public concerts and operatic performances, and substantial developments in music printing and publishing.

The first public opera house was opened only in 1637 and the first public concerts did not take place until the late seventeenth century. The earliest and most consistent patron of music was the Church, although at first it was concerned more with composition – and with vocal rather than instrumental music. Most of the royal and aristocratic families kept a musical establishment as part of their state and were therefore of vital importance to musicians. The enormous development of instrumental forms and styles during the late sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was almost entirely associated with court and aristocratic support. There were, for example, over three hundred states and courts in Germany; these provided musicians with more opportunities for employment than in France, where there were few, or in England, where there was only one.

As with the violin, Italy was undoubtedly the birthplace of the cello; and it was employed increasingly as a solo instrument during the seventeenth century. The first known executant and composer for the instrument was Domenico Gabrielli from Bologna. His contemporary Petronio Franceschini, employed at San Petronio, Bologna, encouraged composers to write specifically for the cello, and he was also one of the founders of the Accademia Filarmonica. Giovanni Bononcini, born in Modena into a famous family of musicians, enjoyed many appointments in the Church and with the nobility in Rome, Vienna and England, where from 1720 he was composer and conductor of the King's Theatre. Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, was a strong supporter and employed him to play at the twice-weekly concerts at her house in St James's. Antonio Tonelli (De'Pietri), from Carpi, played a number of instruments but favoured the cello, as it was then making its way into the orchestra and the concert room. However, the first virtuoso cellist to make an impact on the public
[52] was the Neapolitan, Francesco Alborea, known as 'Francischello'. When

Quantz heard him in Naples, he described him as 'incomparable'.[1] Alborea was also the first to make the cello known in eastern Europe.

Giacobbe Cervetto, born in Italy of Jewish parents, came to London in 1728 and set up shop as a dealer in musical instruments. He also played the cello well enough to become a member of the theatre orchestra at Drury Lane. He was one of the first to promote interest in the cello in England, and, according to Burney, 'brought the violoncello into favour and made us nice judges of that instrument.'[2] Cervetto eventually went into theatre management and became very rich, but he continued playing and teaching the cello; one of his most talented pupils was his son, James.

Among other Italians who helped to popularise the cello in England were Pasqualini, Salvatore Lanzetti and Andrea Caporale. Salvatore Lanzetti was born in Naples, studied at the Conservatoro di S Maria di Loreto and entered the service of Vittorio Amedeo II in Turin. He came to London in the 1730s, where he lived for about twenty years, achieving numerous successes as a cellist. As a composer he was very advanced in his thinking; the technical demands of his cello writing, particularly with regard to bowing, are almost on a level with the Venetian violin concertos. Little is known about Andrea Caporale except that he spent ten years in London (*c.* 1735–45), becoming a celebrity as a soloist and playing in theatre and pleasure-garden orchestras, including Handel's opera orchestra. Burney writes that he possessed 'a full, sweet, and vocal tone', and as such attracted large audiences to the concerts established by the Royal Society of Musicians to raise money for the 'Support of Decay'd Musicians and their Families.'[3]

Giovanni Battista Cirri, who was born in Forlì in Italy, originally took Holy Orders in 1739 but preferred a career in music. He was attached to the chapel of San Petronio, Bologna, and became a member of the Accademia Filarmonica in 1759. He gave concerts in Paris and London, where he settled in 1764. In addition to his concert activities, he became chamber musician to the Duke of York and director of music to the Duke of Gloucester. In 1764 he played in a concert at the Spring Gardens, St James's, at which the eight-year-old Mozart made his first public appearance in London. He returned to Italy in 1780 and became *maestro di cappella* at Forlì Cathedral in 1787. His cello compositions show an unusual harmonic and formal control with virtuoso parts high in the upper register; they also possess a melodic freshness which accounts for their popularity.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the cello had become so popular in Italy that it had ousted the viola da gamba. The key figure in its progress was Luigi Boccherini. He was born in Lucca and studied first with his father Leopoldo, a double-bass player, before continuing with

Francesco Vanucci, *maestro di cappella* of the cathedral at San Martino. Boccherini and his father were regular members of the Imperial Court Theatre Orchestra in Vienna, but they received so little encouragement on returning to Lucca that Luigi decided to settle abroad. After the death of his father in 1766, he teamed up with the violinist Filippo Manfredi; as a duo they toured throughout northern Italy and sojourned in Paris, where they met the Spanish ambassador, who invited them to give some concerts in Madrid. This led to Boccherini's appointment in 1770 as 'violoncellist of Don Luis's Chamber and composer of music, authorised by Charles II'. He received a generous salary and was also permitted to have his music published. After Don Luis's death in 1785, the king continued to guarantee Boccherini a pension. Although still domiciled in Spain, in 1786 Boccherini was conferred with the title 'composer of Our Chamber' by the Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia and was paid handsomely for a number of quartets and quintets, a situation which continued after the prince succeeded to the throne.

After 1787 Boccherini's name disappears from the records, reappearing in 1796 through his letters to Ignace Pleyel, a Viennese composer who settled in Paris and established himself as a music publisher and later a manufacturer of keyboard instruments. Pleyel was an avaricious opportunist who recognised Boccherini's genius as a composer and entered into an agreement to publish all his music. Boccherini was delighted and sent all his manuscripts to Paris, but unfortunately his letters relate a sad account of broken promises, unanswered letters, unreturned manuscripts and money withheld. He had been suffering from tuberculosis since 1765 and his final years were spent in anonymity and poverty.

The gamba was still a favourite instrument in northern Europe, whilst in France the cello was regarded as a crude impostor. However, Martin Berteau from Valenciennes did not ascribe to this view, and he is regarded as the undisputed founder of the French school of cello playing. Berteau began his career as a gambist, studying with the Czech teacher Kozecz; on hearing the legendary Francischello he was immediately attracted to the cello, although he continued to hold the bow gamba-fashion with the hand underneath, as was also customary in Germany and England. In 1739 he played a concerto of his own composition at the Concert Spirituel in Paris, after which he achieved much success in the salons of that city. His playing was praised for its beauty of tone and depth of expression; he also made considerable use of harmonics and developed an advanced system of fingering.

A notable contemporary of Berteau was Jean Barrière, who through his virtuoso performances and compositions also contributed greatly to the development of cello playing in France. Little is known about him except

that he came from a humble Bordelaise family and was living in Paris in 1730 as a *Musicien ordinaire de notre Académie Royale de Musique*. He went to Rome in 1736 for three years, after which he returned to Paris to continue composing for his instrument. His writing overall was idiomatic and technically advanced, especially in those works composed after his stay in Italy.

François Cupis was a pupil of Berteau at the age of eleven, became solo cellist at the Grand Opéra in Paris and toured successfully throughout Europe. He wrote much cello music and was the teacher of numerous famous cellists such as Jean Henri Levasseur and Jean Baptiste Bréval. Bréval is remembered mainly for his large number of cello compositions.

Another pupil of Berteau, Jean-Baptiste-Aimé Janson from Valenciennes, made his debut at the Concert Spirituel at the age of twenty-four; he achieved such success that he was engaged to accompany the Prince of Brunswick to Italy, where he stayed until 1771. Thereafter, he toured extensively throughout Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Poland to great acclaim. The richness and beauty of his tone was said to be outstanding. In 1789 he returned to Paris, where he was invited to be the first professor of cello at the Conservatoire on its establishment in 1795. Sadly he was drawn into the notorious quarrel between Jean-François Lesueur and Bernard Sarrette which resulted in the entire reorganisation of that institution in 1802. Janson was dismissed, could not come to terms with the disgrace and suffered a nervous breakdown, dying within a year.

One of Berteau's most famous pupils was Jean-Pierre Duport, known as Duport *l'aîné* to distinguish him from his even more celebrated brother, Jean-Louis. Sons of a Parisian dancing master, both had shown early musical talent. Jean-Pierre made his debut at the Concert Spirituel in Paris and was immediately appointed a member of Prince de Conti's private band. After his solos in the *Concerts de la Quinzaine de Paques* in 1762, the *Mercure de France* reported: 'In his hands the instrument is no longer recognisable: it speaks, expresses and renders everything with a charm greater than that thought to be exclusive to the violin'.

In 1769 Jean-Pierre gave up his position with the prince in order to travel, visiting Spain and England. When he was in London he played at the 'Professional Concerts' (managed by Lord Abingdon at the Hanover Rooms), with the violinists Pierre Lahoussaye and Maddalena Lombardini Sirmen, both of whom were pupils of Tartini. In 1773 Duport took up an appointment in Berlin with Frederick the Great as chamber musician to the Royal Chapel and solo cellist for the Royal Opera. He also tutored the crown prince, who later became Friedrich Wilhelm II. When the prince ascended the throne in 1786, Duport became Director of the Royal Chamber Music and played only at court. During his stay in Germany he

met both Mozart and Beethoven; Mozart's 'Prussian' Quartets (K.575, 589 and 590), demand an advanced cello technique indicative of Duport's influence.

Jean-Louis Duport began his musical studies as a violinist but, swayed by his elder brother's success, turned to the cello and took lessons with him. He made his debut at the Concert Spirituel in 1768 and the *Mercure de France* described his execution as 'brilliant and astounding', predicting a great future for 'his fine talent'. He visited London in 1783 at the invitation of his friend and co-student, John Crosdill, also his brother's pupil. They appeared together in a number of concerts and Duport also played in the 'Professional Concerts', just as his brother had done some fifteen years before. At the onset of the French Revolution in 1789, Jean-Louis joined his brother in Berlin; he, too, was appointed to the Royal Chapel, where he remained for seventeen years until the death of his royal patron. At this time Europe was perpetually at the mercy of invading armies, so he was obliged to change his domicile many times, returning to Paris in 1807. After five years in Marseilles, playing in the band of ex-King Charles IV of Spain, he finally returned to Paris, where he experienced the most successful period of his career. He was appointed professor at the Conservatoire, solo cellist to Napoleon and member of the empress Marie-Louise's chamber music group, which performed regularly in private concerts at the Tuileries.

Joseph Bonaventure Tillière, yet another pupil of Berteau, was active in France as a performer and composer. In 1760 he played in the orchestra of Prince Conti, and in 1770 he was a member of the Académie Royale de Musique and performed in the Paris Opéra orchestra. His *Méthode pour le violoncelle* (Paris, 1764) follows Michel Corrette's *Méthode, théorique et pratique* (Paris, 1741, and probably the first tutor for the instrument), and treats the cello as a solo instrument, it includes exercises for string-crossing, double-stopping and use of the thumb-position. He also wrote a number of sonatas and duos, as well as a concerto.

In England, the viol reigned supreme until the middle of the eighteenth century, principally because it was favoured by the upper classes; in other words, it was 'a gentleman's instrument'. The violin was regarded as vulgar and fit only for use in taverns and fairgrounds; thus, any member of the violin family was looked on as being of the same ilk. King Charles II had modelled his 'Twenty-four Violins' on Louis XIV's 'grande bande'; one of its members, William Saunders, played the 'bass' violin, but his influence was not felt beyond the court.

It was not until about 1733 that the cello superseded the bass viol in English orchestras, and even then the players were mostly Italian. A remarkable exception was Bartholomew Johnson, who appeared as a

soloist in London around 1770 and for seventy years was one of the 'town waites'. Benjamin Hallett, probably the first child prodigy on the cello, appeared at the age of six, dressed in female clothes. A surviving picture shows that he held the instrument like a double bass, supporting it with the left hand; but he also held the bow at a point at least one-third of its length from the heel.

Another important cellist of this time was James Cervetto, son of the *émigré* Italian Giacobbe Cervetto, who received his early instruction from his father and appeared at the Little Haymarket Theatre when he was only thirteen. He was said to be an expressive player with a 'nobility of style' and became popular not only in England but also in the principal cities of Europe. His numerous compositions display a distinct advance in technical demand over those of his Italian predecessors. John Crosdill, a contemporary of Cervetto, began his musical education as a choirboy at Westminster Abbey and had his first cello lessons as a nine-year-old from his father, a pupil of Jean-Pierre Duport. He was elected a member of the Royal Society of Musicians when he was only seventeen and was appointed first cellist in the Three Choirs Festival at Gloucester a year later. In 1775 he furthered his studies with the elder Duport, becoming a fellow student and friend of Jean-Louis Duport. As we know, it was Crosdill who persuaded Jean-Louis to play in London. Crosdill's career went from strength to strength; he was appointed first cellist of the Concert of Antient Music when it was established in 1776 and was also a member of the Chapel Royal, the King's Band of Music and chamber musician to Queen Charlotte. He gave cello lessons to the Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV) and, as a result, became a favourite in court circles as the most fashionable cello teacher of the day. His pupils included many aristocrats but also several who later became professional musicians, the most distinguished being Robert Lindley. John Gunn, from Edinburgh, taught the cello in Cambridge and moved to London in 1789, where he published many learned treatises on instrumental playing.

It is important to remember that there were few instruction books at this time, so techniques and performing conventions were generally passed down by word of mouth from teacher to pupil. One of the first tutors, Robert Crome's *The Compleat Tutor for the Violoncello* (London, *c.* 1765), contains some advice on what is obviously a forerunner of the spike:

> This instrument may be Consider'd as a large Fiddle only held the contrary way, and the fourth string is next to the Bow Hand, as the Body is turn'd downward, the lower part to rest on the Calves of the Legs supported with the knees, but for the greater ease of a Learner we would advize him to have a hole made in the Tail-pin and a Wooden Peg to screw into it to rest upon the Floor which may be taken out when he pleases.[4]

Crome therefore implies that once the learner has control of his instrument he can dispense with the peg. This was written over a hundred years before the introduction of the endpin.

It is not known exactly when the cello superseded the viol in Germany. As there appear to have been numerous cellists in that country before 1700, it may be reasonably assumed that the transition coincided with that in Italy. One of the first names on record is Gregor Christoph Eylenstein, from Gelmroda near Weimar, who was chamber musician to the Duke of Weimar. Johann Sebald Triemer, also from Weimar and a pupil of Eylenstein, was one of the first virtuoso cellists. His musical education was sponsored by the duke and he became a member of the court orchestra; he later travelled extensively in Germany, France and Holland. Another excellent cellist was Riedel from Silesia, who in 1727 went to St Petersburg, where Czar Peter II appointed him to the court orchestra and as a teacher of cello and fencing. Johann Baptist Baumgartner, from Augsburg, was chamber musician to the prince bishop at Eichstadt. He toured successfully throughout Europe, England and Scandinavia, and also composed for his instrument. Johann Christoph Schetky was born in Darmstadt into a musical family with whom he toured throughout Europe, astounding audiences with his virtuosity. He appeared in London in 1770, where he found a patron in Johann Christian Bach. He also composed extensively for the cello.

The Bavarian Joseph Weigl was appointed, on Haydn's recommendation, to the private band of Prince Esterházy and went on to play in the opera orchestra in Vienna, eventually becoming a member of the emperor's private band. One of the most outstanding virtuosi of his day was Johann Konrad Schlick, from Munster in Westphalia. He held many court and church appointments, and with his wife, the violinist Regina Strinasacchi, he toured most of Europe's principal towns. In the winter season of 1799–1800 he was engaged as a soloist for the Gewandhaus concerts, a sign that opportunities for the cello soloist were increasing.

Although the foregoing executants all contributed to the popularity of the cello as a solo instrument, they did not stem from any main roots. It is Bernhard Heinrich Romberg who is regarded as the undisputed 'father' of the German school. He was not only considerably gifted as a player, but also a fine composer. Born in Dinklage into a family of musicians, he received his first lessons from Johann Schlick and appeared in public at the age of seven with his violinist cousin, Andreas. They later successfully toured Europe, meeting Viotti at the Concert Spirituel in Paris in 1784. Both Romberg's playing and composition were said to have benefited from this French influence.

Romberg met Beethoven in Bonn and the two became friends. During this time, the violinist Franz Ries and Andreas and Bernhard Romberg formed a string quartet with Beethoven on the viola. The Rombergs also played in a piano trio with Beethoven. Beethoven admired Romberg's playing, but Romberg found it hard to understand his friend's compositions. He thought the Op. 18 quartets 'absurd' and the Razumovsky quartets 'unplayable'.[5] Romberg's career took him to Vienna, the main cities in England, Spain and Portugal, and Paris, where he spent two years as a professor at the Conservatoire. He held a number of court appointments in Berlin, St Petersburg and Moscow and also travelled widely in Russia, promoting considerable interest in the cello.

Romberg's compositions are now regarded as being only of academic interest, but are of considerable value if considered in the light of their time. He employed a number of new ideas which later led other composers to extend the capabilities of the instrument. He made greater use of the thumb-position than any other composer since Boccherini, and paid tribute to Jean-Louis Duport for the establishment of a system of fingering, which in turn he used to develop left-hand technique to an advanced level. Despite his perpetual travels as a performer, he wrote operas, concertos, sonatas, duets, divertimenti and countless other works, including a cello method. Romberg also used his inventiveness to suggest modifications to the instrument itself (see pp. 14 and 242n29), and he was a fine teacher, counting among his many pupils Pierre Norblin, Mathieu Wielhorsky, Adolf Press, Friedrich Kummer and August Prell. He undoubtedly had a significant influence on cello playing in his time, especially on Friedrich Dotzauer, founder of the Dresden school.

Many virtuoso cellists of the eighteenth century were of Bohemian origin, notably Johann Cermak, who was heard in Warsaw by Joseph Fiala and deemed an excellent player. The Neruda family were all accomplished musicians. Johann Georg Neruda played both violin and cello and, for thirty years, was master of the Chapel Royal at Dresden. Little is known about the cellist Kozcek except that he was apparently a fine teacher, counting E. Václav Petrik among his pupils. Petrik, from Libachovice in Bohemia, was considered one of the best cellists of his time and an excellent teacher; he was also famous for playing violin compositions on the cello. One of his pupils, Ignaz (Hynck) Mara, went to Berlin where he was appointed to the king's private music, a position he held for thirty years. Ignaz's son, Johann Baptist Mara, was a highly talented cellist who was engaged by Prince Henry of Prussia as one of his chamber musicians. Unfortunately, he was a drunkard and a gambler and died in poverty in Holland. Joseph Reicha from Prague, uncle of the composer Antoine Reicha, was a member of both the court and theatre

orchestras in Bonn, in which the fifteen-year-old Beethoven played the viola.

The Kraft family also plays a prominent part in the history of the cello. Anton Kraft, born in Rokitzau in Bohemia, originally studied law, but his progress on the cello was such that he was engaged for the Chapel Royal in Vienna. Haydn secured for him a place in Prince Esterházy's court orchestra, and Kraft was later employed in a similar capacity by Prince Grassalkowitz in Vienna. In 1793, with Ignaz Schuppanzigh as leader, Prince Lichnowski as second violin and Franz Weiss on viola, Kraft formed the famous Schuppanzigh Quartet, which performed the works of Haydn, Mozart and, later, Beethoven, directed by the composer. He was an important influence in that he brought the Czech traditions to Vienna and combined them with those of the Viennese Classical school. His playing was known for a beautiful singing tone and an impeccable technique. Anton's son, Nicolaus Kraft, studied initially with his father and later with Jean-Louis Duport in Berlin. He also had a distinguished career as a member of the Lobkowitz chapel orchestra and as a soloist. An injury to his right hand forced him to give up performing in 1834, but his compositions represent a significant contribution to the cello literature.

Bernhard Václav Stiastny, from Prague, was not a virtuoso cellist but a meticulous ensemble player, and for many years was principal cellist in the Prague Opera Orchestra. He was also an excellent teacher and was first professor at the Conservatoire until 1822. His published writings include a tutor for his instrument. His brother, Jan, held a number of court appointments and surpassed him both in playing and composition, contributing much to the cello repertory; his *Six Duos for Two Cellos*, for example, contain passage-work showing an ingenuity that, at the time, must have been a revelation.

By the close of the eighteenth century musical composition was pointing more and more towards the Romanticism that would flower so profusely in the nineteenth century. As far as the cello is concerned, it was Romberg who formed the main link between the Classical and Romantic periods, and in so doing looked forward to the developments of the nineteenth century.