

Cello Development from Gabrielli to Vivaldi

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Resumo: Esse artigo apresenta uma história do violoncelo como instrumento solista. Desde a primeira obra escrita com esse objetivo, os *Ricercare* de Domenico Gabrielli, até as Sonatas para violoncelo solo, de Antonio Vivaldi, houve um intervalo de apenas cinquenta anos, todavia, grandes aperfeiçoamentos técnicos mudaram as maneiras através das quais o violoncelo poderia ser utilizado na música. Através do conhecimento desse desenvolvimento, violoncelistas serão capazes de procurar melhores maneiras de identificar questões técnicas nesse repertório, de modo coerente, assim como músicos em geral poderão apreender sobre os caminhos que levaram o instrumento a figurar como um personagem fundamental na história da música.

Palavras-chave: Boccherini; Vivaldi; Violoncelo; Performance histórica; Música barroca.

O Desenvolvimento do Violoncelo de Grabielli a Vivaldi

Abstract: This paper presents a history of the cello as a soloist instrument. Since the first piece written with this intention, Domenico Gabrielli's *Ricercare* up to Antonio Vivaldi's Sonatas there is a gap of only fifty years, but huge improvements have changed the ways the cello was used in music. Through the knowledge of this development the cello player will be able to search for a better comprehension of technical demands of these pieces of music and musicians in general will be able to learn about the paths taken by the instrument to build it up as a canonic character of music history.

Keywords: Boccherini; Vivaldi; Cello; Performing practice; Baroque music.

1. The Cello and its Idiom

At the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, the school of Bologna in Northern Italy was the birthplace of the violoncello (popularly known as the cello) as a solo instrument and responsible for its initial technical evolution. The School of Bologna can be divided into two institutions: the Accademia Filarmonica and the Basilica di San Petronio (Saint Petronio Basilica).¹ Besides being in the mainstream of the development of cello technique, Bologna was the cornerstone of cello literature. This “new” instrument became popular after passing through Vivaldi's Venice, coming back from Corelli's Rome, and finally reaching Lucca, where it found its apogee in Boccherini.

Until fairly recently, performers and scholars assumed that the *Ricercate sopra il violoncello ó clavicembalo*, written in 1687 by the Bolognese composer Giovanni Battista degl'Antonii (ca. 1610-1698), were the first pieces written for solo cello. The word “*sopra*” makes us aware that these pieces were in fact written-out continuo parts – as the title says, for violoncello or harpsichord – especially if we take into account the figured bass written in the cello/harpsichord line.² As further proof, Marc Vanscheeuwijck recently found violin parts for these pieces in the Biblioteca Ducal di Modena (Italy). The continuo parts require relative technically advanced playing by the performer, which is probably why they survived as solo pieces for many years.³

The canzone, the *ricercare*, and the sonata, common instrumental genres in the late seventeenth century, took vocal music as their departure point. The first true set of pieces for cello solo were the *Ricercare* written in 1689 by Domenico Gabrielli (1640-1690), a composer and cellist born and active in Bologna, otherwise known, because of his size, as

the “*Mingéin dal viulunzèl*” in Bolognese dialect, or “*Minghino del violoncello*” in Italian. *Mingéin* or *Minghino* means both the diminutive for Domenico and “pinkie.” Until then, the cello was mainly used as a continuo instrument, and often not specified in the music. The cello was by that time smaller in its proportions and faster in response than other common bass instruments.⁴

Gabrielli composed a group of seven *ricercari* for solo cello, a Canon for two celli, and finally four pieces for cello and basso continuo, apparently intended as a four-movement sonata. These pieces have improvisatory characteristics,⁵ where the performer mixes chordal and scalar passages.⁶



Example 1: Domenico Gabrielli, Ricercar No. 2, opening

In the three first beats of Ricercar No. 2, Gabrielli transforms a chord (A minor) into a melody. This technique is used repeatedly throughout the piece, as if the performer were looking for cadences, each of these cadences delineates one section of motivic exploration from another, bringing to us directly to the word *Ricerca*, which means “searching” in Italian.

The cello literature that emerged in the late seventeenth century also mirrored the violin literature and technique of the time. For instance, Gabrielli’s Ricercar No. 7 uses double stops (see Ex. 2), just as Biagio Marini did in his violin sonatas. The change of character with the change of meter in between the second and third lines anticipated the function of separate movements less than a decade later.



Example 2: Gabrielli, Ricercar No. 7, mm. 61-89

Another common form was the *canon*. Example 3 shows Gabrielli leaving aside the modal texture and going toward a contrapuntal and tonal structure (D major), another step in the evolution of compositional style in that period.



Example 3: Gabrielli, Canon for two cello, opening

Gabrielli's four last *ricercari* are for cello and basso continuo (see Ex. 4), which can be taken to be a sonata in four movements. The movements are well defined and all in G major. The opening movement, Grave, is marked at entry 8 in the facsimile and Allegro at entry 9, which can therefore be considered as the second movement. As in most of Corelli's violin sonatas, the movements are separate. At the end of the Grave there are two measures of Adagio and four measures of Presto, which add expressiveness and freedom. Gabrielli concludes this set of pieces with a singing Largo and a virtuoso gigue-like Presto.

The image displays a musical score for cello and continuo, consisting of ten systems of two staves each. The notation is in G major and includes various rhythmic values and articulations. The first system is marked 'Grave'. The second system is marked 'Allegro'. The third system contains markings for 'Adagio' and 'Presto'. The score is a facsimile of a handwritten manuscript, showing some ink bleed-through and irregularities in the notation.

Example 4: Gabrielli, Sonata for cello and continuo, opening

Gabrielli's *Ricercari* mark the birth of a new role for the cello. After that, Petronio Franceschini, a contemporary of Gabrielli's and also employed at San Petronio Basilica, encouraged other composers to write for the instrument in Bologna and elsewhere.⁷

2. Other Cellists and Composers of the Time

Franceschini was the first cellist employed at San Petronio, co-founder of the Accademia Filarmonica of Bologna,⁸ and cellist in a particular ensemble of this Accademia known as the Concerto Grande, a predecessor of the modern orchestra. He was interested in the cello not only as a continuo instrument but also as a solo instrument.

In Modena, the Bononcini brothers, Giovanni (1670-1747) and Antonio Maria (1677-1726), worked as protégés of the Duke of Modena, Francesco II. Both of them studied in San Petronio with masters such as Colonna, Legrenzi, and Franceschini, and both were in close contact with the cellists of Bologna. A. M. Bononcini wrote twelve sonatas between 1693 and 1725.⁹

Among the other virtuosi who appeared in this first stage of cello history was Domenico Galli in Parma. Little is known about him, but there is a treatise on the instrument written by him that can be found in the Biblioteca Estense di Modena, *Trattenimento musicale del violoncello a solo* (1691).¹⁰

Angelo Bovi, D. Maria Marcheselli, Benedetto Zavatleri, G. B. Vitali, and Giuseppe Jacchini were cellists in Bologna, connected with the San Petronio Basilica. Clemente Monari and G. B. degl'Antonii were also active in Bologna, but not connected with San Petronio.¹¹

Francesco Alborea (1691-1770), better known as "Francisc(h)ello,"¹² was active in Naples and Rome. J. J. Quantz described him as an "incomparable cellist,"¹³ who was credited with the use of the thumb position (*capotasto*), described in Michel Corrette's *Méthode théorique e pratique pour apprendre en peu de temps le violoncello dans sa perfection*.¹⁴

Franciscello's advanced technique gives us the basis for understanding the bass parts (*Violone*) in Corelli's violin sonatas (Op. 5, 1700) – in particular *La Folia*, which requires the use of *capotasto*, and the violoncello parts in his Trio Sonatas and Concerti Grossi. All these parts have fast runs, melodic lines, and a demanding technique, meeting the descriptions of Franciscello's playing.

It is important to point out that the pitch in Rome was lower (A = 395). At this pitch for larger instruments, the strings would be too loose and lacking enough tension to play demanding technical passages such as fast sixteenth notes, which makes the use of a smaller instrument essential.

Three advanced cellists from this same period were Salvatore Lanzetti in Turin, Francesco Tedeschini in Mantua, and Domenico Della Bella, cellist and *maestro di cappella* in Treviso.

3. Cellists in Venice

Venice was an important music center. There cellists were employed in the Basilica di San Marco as *maestri de' concerti*, among them Antonio Caldara (ca. 1670-1736), famous composer and responsible for the important influence of Italian music on Austria. He worked in Vienna at the *Hofkapelle*.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) was one of the most important composers of operas and instrumental music. He wrote concertos and sonatas for the cello, probably inspired by

the technique of Giacomo Taneschi, a Venetian cellist recognized for his virtuosity in 1706 and hired freelance at San Marco,¹⁵ and Antonio Vandini, cello master at La Pietà (1720).¹⁶ Vivaldi composed his sonatas around the 1720s and 30s. Six of them (nine survive) appeared in a first edition in 1740, published by Le Clerc & Boivin in Paris¹⁷

The manuscripts of Vivaldi come from different sources. There are two manuscripts of Sonata RV 46 in B-flat major, one from the Musikbibliothek des Grafen von Schönborn-Wiesentheid and the other in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, with different headings for the same movements (see Table 1).

Table 1: Antonio Vivaldi, Sonata RV 46, movements

Sonata RV 46 in B-flat major for cello and basso continuo	Bibliothèque Nationale	Musikbibliothek des Grafen von Schönborn-Wiesentheid
First movement	Largo	Preludio Largo
Second movement	Allegro	Allemanda Allegro
Third movement	Largo	Largo
Fourth movement	Allegro	Corrente Allegro



Example 5: Vivaldi, Sonata for cello and continuo, RV 46, manuscript from Wiesentheid, I, opening

The first movement of this sonata, in binary form, displays Vivaldi's vocal treatment of the cello, a little like the aria "Sposa son disprezzata," a da capo aria from his opera *Bajazet* of 1735.

Note the long notes right in the opening of Ex. 5, and how the cello moves downwards with faster notes in the second measure of this very example. In the last measure of the first line in Ex. 6, the voice is treated in the same way: long note, then separated faster notes in the first measure of the second line. Ex. 6 has indications of *forte* for the long notes, and *piano* for the faster ones, indicating that attention is on the long note. Vivaldi probably used the *messa di voce* to bring out the color of the instrument or vocal timbre (see Exx. 5 and 6). Also note that in the accompaniment of both examples, there is no movement, so as not to disturb the *messa di voce*.

It is also important to point out that Vivaldi uses staccato markings under a single slur. This technique is derived from vocal lines, as in Monteverdi's "Zefiro torna" from *Scherzi musicali* (1632), where toward the end of the piece the two tenors perform ascending scales with staccatos under one slur, on the word "canto" (sing).

Example 6: Vivaldi, "Sposa son disprezzata" from *Bajazet* (the third measure of this ex.)

Vivaldi wrote a number of cello concerti, many of them for the students of the Ospedale della Pietà, where he worked for most of his career. We know that two of them were intended for Teresa, known as La Santina.¹⁸

Violoncello

The image shows a musical score for the cello part of Vivaldi's Concerto in G major, RV 413, first movement. The score is written on seven staves, alternating between treble and bass clefs. It includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and fingerings. Measure numbers 70, 75, 85, 90, and 95 are marked in boxes. The piece is in G major and 3/4 time.

Example 7: Vivaldi, Concerto in G major for Cello and Orchestra, RV 413, first movement (Allegro), mm. 66–98

Vivaldi is using some of the techniques that were idiomatic of the violin, such as *ondeggiando* (m. 71). Also note the use of three clefs, reflecting a bigger range for the instrument, and more demanding and more complicated technique. This shows the rapid progress of cello playing in the half century that had passed since Gabrielli's compositions.

Conclusions

From this information it is possible to construct an overview of the technical development of the instrument, as well as understand the development of its musical possibilities. That intrinsic relationship was really outstanding in that period, and it was responsible for make the cello one of the most important musical instruments in history until today.

The supporting role, it was renumbered as protagonist and, for this reason, several technical and musical demands continued to emerge. Therefore, the same method used

here proceeds to be applied in the interpretation of historical data, based on historical treatises about the instrument, so it is possible to figure out the role of the cello in each piece of music history, and cello players today will be able to build more coherent performances to the musical material.

Notas

- ¹ BONTA, 1977, p. 77.
- ² Cf:VANSCHEEUWIJCK, 1998.
- ³ Cf: <http://www.mozart.co.uk/mzusers/pieces/12ric.txt>; transcribed from the preface to *Dodice Ricercate sopra il violoncello* di G. B. Antonii (Amsterdam: Jolante de Tempe, 1999).
- ⁴ BONTA, 1978, p 1.
- ⁵ OSSI, Massimo. (in process of publication).
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ STOWELL, 1999, p. 52.
- ⁸ Ibid., 52.
- ⁹ BONONCINI, 1996.
- ¹⁰ See <http://ntcredazione.sbn.it/upload/sfogliatori/trattenimento/trattenimento.jsp?s=6&l=it>.
- ¹¹ COWLING, 1983, p. 65.
- ¹² *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. [ARTICLE ON HIM]
- ¹³ COWLING, 1983, p. 67.
- ¹⁴ WALDEN, 1998, p. 126.
- ¹⁵ SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 1994, p. 251.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 43.
- ¹⁷ Antonio Vivaldi, 2003.
- ¹⁸ Vivaldi, *IX sonate a violoncello*. Preface, 27.

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46: *stampa di Le Clerc et Boivin, Paris, s.d*, Archivum Musicum. Vivaldiana (Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 2003).

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