

INTRODUCTION

The six sonatas of Opus 5 are Geminiani's only solo works for cello, and were rapidly followed by his own adaptation of all six for violin. Both versions appeared in 1746, first in Paris, later in the Hague and (after some apparent commercial chicanery) in London. From the small number of surviving copies (RISM lists only five copies of the cello version, and eleven of the violin), they do not appear to have achieved the high sales of his earlier sonatas and concertos, maybe because of their technical difficulty and "fantastical" style. However since the 20th century their status has risen perhaps more than any other opus of Geminiani, evidenced by more than one printed edition and several facsimile reissues of original prints.

Geminiani's lifetime saw the ascendancy of the cello over the viola da gamba, and while working in Naples, Paris and London he came into contact with many of its foremost advocates. Charles Burney reported that

Geminiani used to relate, that *Franceschilli* [Francesco Alborea], a celebrated performer on the violoncello at the beginning of this century, accompanied one of [Alessandro Scarlatti's] cantatas at Rome so admirably, while Scarlatti was at the harpsichord, that the company, being good Catholics and living in a country where miraculous powers have not yet ceased, were firmly persuaded it was not Franceschelli who had played the violoncello, but an angel that had descended and assumed his shape.¹

The cello in mid-18th-century Europe

In the battle between the viola da gamba and the cello, Italian cellist-composers were influential throughout Europe; Naples in particular was a hotbed of revolutionaries. In addition to the 'divine' Alborea (1691-1739), there was Francesco Scipriani (1678-1753) who wrote one of the earliest known instruction manuals, *Principij da imparare a suonare il violoncello e con 12 toccate a solo* (undated MS in Naples). Salvatore Lanzetti (c1710-80), like Geminiani, worked both in Paris and London and published a set of sonatas for cello in Amsterdam (Op. 1, 1736); two later sets of sonatas described as "for two Violoncellos" were published in England (c1740 and 1747) both with a dedication to the cello-playing Prince of Wales. Also from Naples came Andrea Caporale and Pasquale Pericoli. Giorgio Antoniotto (c1692-1776), originally from Milan, lived in Holland, and either he or his publisher voted both ways with his *XII Sonate le prime V a Violoncello Solo & Basso l'altre VII a due Violoncelli ovvero due Viole di Gamba, Op. 1* published in Amsterdam in about 1735. Hawkins claimed that he spent some years in London before 1760.² His theoretical work *L'Arte armonica: or, A Treatise on the Composition of Musick* appeared there in that year, in an anonymous English translation, said by some to be by Geminiani.

In England it was immigrant Italian cellists, such as Lanzetti (author of *Principes ou l'application de violoncelle par tous les tons* (Amsterdam, c1760)), Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747), Nicola Haym (1678-1729) – who was also a librettist, concert organiser and antiquarian, – Pasqualini de Marzis (*fl.* 1740s) and that Methuselah of cellists, Giacobbe Basevi Cervetto (1680-1783), who established both the standard of solo playing and the prevailing style of composition for the instrument, founded firmly on the symmetrical phraseology, sequential extensions, predictable harmony and cantabile character epitomised by Vivaldi and Benedetto Marcello. Walsh had first published Marcello's Op. 2 sonatas for cello in 1732 and Vivaldi's set of six sonatas appeared in a French print in 1740.

¹ Burney, vol. iv, p. 169. Walter Kolneder claims Geminiani heard Francesco Alborea in Rome in 1713 but quotes no source (*Antonio Vivaldi: His Life and Work*, London 1970, p. 128).

² Hawkins, vol. v, p. 393.