

Introduction

Giacobo Cervetto (also Giacobbe, Jakobo, Giacomo) was born in Italy in 1682.⁷ He descended from the Jewish Basevi Cervetto family resident in Verona. Between 1728 and 1738 he went to London, where he was initially active as a cellist and a dealer in music instruments, later also as a composer. As far as we know, the first public concert in which he appeared as a soloist took place in 1742 in the Drury Lane Theatre. From that time on, and until he was ninety-seven years old, he played an important role in London's musical life. He is known to have participated in numerous concerts, including in the King's Theatre, in the New Theatre in the Haymarket, and as a member of the Vauxhall Orchestra. His son James (1748–1837) likewise became a well-known cellist,⁸ for which reason Giacobbo was also referred to as “Cervetto the Elder.” In the 1760s Giacobbo seems to have given up his solo career in deference to that of his son. He died in London at the age of 101 as a highly esteemed musician. Late in life, he earned considerable wealth as a theater manager, leaving behind more than 20,000 pounds sterling.

Cervetto numbered among a group of London-based Italians who popularized the violoncello as a solo instrument in England. Although Cervetto's playing was apparently brilliant in terms of technique, Burney described his sound as “raw, crude, and uninteresting.”⁹

Between 1741 and 1758 Cervetto published numerous chamber music works in London, mainly solos, duos, and trios for cellos, as well as a concerto for cello and orchestra. The present collection of six duets for two cellos appeared in London in 1761,¹⁰ when Cervetto was nearly eighty years old. The title reads: *Six Lessons or Divertiments for two Violoncellos Composed by Sigr. Cervetto, Opera Quarta*.¹¹ The two parts are notated in score form.

Our edition follows the original print as exactly as possible. Suggested corrections in the musical text are elucidated in footnotes. The slurs in the original are not always unambiguously placed or often vary in parallel passages. We do not know whether this was due to the printing technique or if it was intentional. In our transcription, we have endeavored to do justice to the original as well as to the requirements of a modern practical edition. Editorial slurs are given as dashed lines and added articulation marks appear in square brackets. Accidentals conform to modern practice, and are thus not repeated within a measure. Accidentals that deviate from the source are given in brackets. The note values of appoggiaturas correspond to those in the original. It should be noted here that, also in English music of the early Classical period, appoggiaturas should be played *on* the beat and slurred to the main note. Independent of the manner of notation, they normally take half the duration of the main note, or, when it is dotted, two thirds.¹²

Cervetto's works, which constitute an important enrichment of the cello repertoire, represent the transitional period between the Baroque and the Classical eras in which the cello developed from a bass into a solo instrument. The present duets indeed pose some technical and rhythmical challenges, but are nevertheless relatively easy. This is also because chords and notes higher than c² appear only seldom. These duets have not hitherto appeared in a complete edition in modern times.

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Heidelberg, February 2014
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⁷ See *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Ludwig Finscher, *Personenteil* 4 (Kassel etc., 2000).

⁸ The report of a duet by C. F. Abel for two violoncellos, “as performed at the Hanover-Square Concert by Messrs. Crosdill, & Cervetto,” refers to James Cervetto; see Carl Friedrich Abel, *A Duetto for two Violoncellos*, eds. G. und L. v. Zadow, Güntersberg G141 (Heidelberg 2008).

⁹ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (London 1776–89), vol. 4, p. 669.

¹⁰ Some sources give 1754 as the year of publication.

¹¹ Copies of the original print are today found in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and in the British Library in London, among other places.

¹² Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (Berlin, 1753), “Von den Vorschlägen.”