

Introduction

Giacobo Cervetto (also Giacobbe, Jakobo, Giacomo) was born ca. 1681/82 in Italy.¹ 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,² 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.”³

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 twelve solos or sonatas for cello and basso continuo was published in London in ca. 1750, when Cervetto was already over seventy years old. Our edition is based on the copy in Dresden (Mus. 2393.R.2).⁴ The title reads: *Twelve Solos | for a VIOLONCELLO | With a Thorough Bass for the Harpsicord | ... | Composed by | Sig^r. Cervetto.*⁵ The two parts are notated in score form. The bass part is figured.

Our edition follows the original print as exactly as possible. Suggested corrections in the musical text are elucidated in the score by footnotes. Editorial slurs are given as dashed lines and added articulation marks appear in square brackets. Accidentals that deviate from the source are given in brackets. The cello part is notated in bass and tenor clefs, which we have retained, although the places where they change have occasionally been shifted slightly. The occasional tenor-clef passages in the bass part have been put into bass clef. 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.⁶

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 sonatas are ordered progressively. While the first sonatas are kept relatively easy, the later sonatas place greater technical and rhythmical demands on the player, but they remain within the compass of the bass and tenor clefs. All of the sonatas are very well suited as duos for two cellos. These sonatas have not hitherto appeared in a complete edition in modern times.

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¹ See *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Personenteil*, ed. Ludwig Finscher (Kassel etc., 2000).

² The report of a duet by C. F. Abel for two violoncellos, “as performed [in the year 1788] 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 (Heidelberg: Güntersberg, 2008), G141.

³ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (London 1776–89), vol. 4, p. 669.

⁴ Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden (SLUB Dresden).

⁵ The Dresden print does not specify the opus number. Another print, issued at around the same time by John Walsh, provides the indication “opera seconda.”

⁶ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (Berlin, 1753), “Von den Vorschlägen.”