# 3 The violinists of the Baroque and Classical periods

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During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the violin underwent an astonishing transformation of role. A lowly dance instrument at the beginning of the period, it had by 1800 become a dominant force in Western musical culture. Virtuoso violinists were fêted at court and public concert alike, and only singers were more highly rewarded. While none could perhaps be placed among the very front rank of composers, many violinists were important creative figures, including Heinrich von Biber, Arcangelo Corelli, Antonio Vivaldi and Giovanni Battista Viotti. Indeed the instrument's capabilities influenced the course of musical style itself, to the extent that singers in the early eighteenth century were expected to be able to rival the figurations of violin music. The period also saw the establishment of the string basis of the orchestra, and violinists such as Jean-Baptiste Lully and Johann Stamitz played a major part in the refinement of orchestral discipline. In addition the violin was accepted during the eighteenth century as an accomplishment for gentlemen amateurs.

These developments were closely tied in with those of musical life in general. Early-seventeenth-century Italy was a hotbed of experiment, culminating in the operatic masterpieces of Monteverdi. The violin was the only instrument fully able to match the voice in the new aesthetic, which favoured a subjective and strongly projected individuality, expressed in a dramatic 'affective' idiom, with exuberant virtuosity and ornamentation. Both violinists and style spread through Austria and Germany, but the new Italian manner was rejected in seventeenth-century France, and only guardedly accepted in England. After a period of consolidation in Italy, culminating in the pivotal figure of Corelli, the eighteenth century witnessed a new wave of Italian virtuoso influence throughout Europe. Around the mid century a distinct German school was associated with the dynamic orchestral idioms of the early Classical period, focused on the Mannheim orchestra under Stamitz. Paris not only succumbed to the soloistic idiom, but became a cosmopolitan centre for violin playing in the second half of the century, the influence



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of Viotti eventually leading to the foundation of the modern French school of violin playing in the 1790s.

Changes in the status of the violinist can be perceived in the late eighteenth century. Increasing specialisation resulted in an emphasis on soloistic display, which was often (with the notable exception of Viotti) allied to a decline in compositional aspiration. Some preferred to concentrate instead on orchestral leading, even as the violinist's supremacy as orchestral director was being challenged by keyboard players, a dichotomy only resolved in the nineteenth century by the acceptance of the baton-wielding conductor.

## Dance-bands and court orchestras

The history of violin playing in the sixteenth century remains rather shadowy, despite the archival researches of David Boyden and others. While the viol was a favoured instrument of gentlemen's recreation, the violin was primarily a professional instrument: its sharply-etched tone and lively manner recommended it for dance-music and dinner entertainment. But it also played a part in extravagant court spectacles such as the famous Florentine *intermedi* for the 1589 wedding festivities of Ferdinando de' Medici. More surprisingly, perhaps, there is evidence that the violin was also used in sixteenth-century Italian church music.

Around 1555 an Italian dance-band was introduced at the French court, headed by one of the first named violinists – Baltazarini, or Balthasar de Beaujoyeux. He achieved considerable influence at court, and was largely responsible for the celebrated *Circé ou le balet comique de la royne* of 1581. The score, published the following year, includes dances for five-part strings, the first printed music to specify the violin. Such an ensemble became particularly associated with French court entertainment. Its official status was confirmed in 1626 by the establishment of the 'Vingt-quatre Violons du Roi' (a five-part string orchestra with three viola lines). French music in the second half of the seventeenth century was dominated by another Italian violinist and dancer, Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–87). By 1656 he had taken over the smaller 'Petits Violons', with which he developed a new precision and a crisp style of string playing, using short French bows in a highly rhythmic fashion. This was the first permanent, well-disciplined string orchestra – but it was not the venue for violinistic experiment, and it was several decades before the violin was allowed to develop as a solo instrument in France.

England, too, retained a conservative stance. Though the violin was known there in the sixteenth century, the viol retained its status well into the next century. In 1676, Thomas Mace, evidently fighting a rearguard action, decried the '*High-Priz'd Noise*' of a string orchestra, 'which is rather fit to make a Mans *Ears Glow*, and fill his *Brains full of Frisks*, &c.

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than to *Season, and Sober his Mind*'.[1] By this time, however, Charles II had already instituted his own 'Twenty-Four Violins' on the French model, and violins had been introduced at the Chapel Royal. Furthermore, as will be seen, the English proved more susceptible than the French to the seductions of Italianate virtuosity.

## Virtuoso violinists in seventeenth-century Italy

By the time of Mace, Italian violinists had developed a soloistic technique far beyond anything expected in France or England. The earliest virtuosi were mostly associated with North Italian cities: it can be no coincidence that Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo*, produced at Mantua in 1607, includes a violin duet of intricate filigree brilliance as a symbol of Orpheus' musical prowess. Still more idiomatic are the interweaving motives and iridescent figuration of the violin parts in his Vespers collection, published in Venice in 1610. A string-player himself, Monteverdi continued to exploit string effects: measured *tremolo* and pizzicato are vividly used to depict the battle scenes in *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624).

One of the first violin virtuosi, Biagio Marini (c.1587–1663), served under Monteverdi at St Mark's, Venice, from 1615. Others, such as Carlo Farina (c.1600–c.1640), Salamone Rossi (1570–1630) and Giovanni Battista Buonamente (d.1642), were associated with the Mantuan court in the early years of the seventeenth century. All of these, and most sensationally Marco Uccellini (c.1603–80) at Modena, developed the resources of the violin remarkably quickly. Much of their music is avowedly experimental, often improvisatory, showing a liberated delight in novel instrumental effect for its own sake. But it would be a mistake to judge these pioneer Italians on the basis of the farmyard effects of Farina's notorious *Capriccio stravagante* (1627). The preoccupation with technical experiment was part of the current search for the widest range of expression, as on the opera stage. Significantly one of the idioms transferred to the violin was the intense and declamatory style of current recitative.

Violinists were already finding employment at major cathedrals and courts throughout Italy. With the opening of the first public opera-house in Venice in 1637, a new source of income opened up, though the extravagant ensemble of *L'Orfeo* was forsaken for smaller pit-bands (perhaps only a pair of violins with accompanying continuo). Italian violinists were also in demand outside their own country.

## The new style in Germany and England

The virtuoso ideal spread rapidly to the courts of Austria and Germany. Marini spent much of his life north of the Alps, while Buonamente was

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in Vienna at least from 1626 to 1629. Farina took up a post in 1625 at the Dresden court, working alongside Heinrich Schütz (who had himself studied in Italy). It was not long before local violinists achieved equal or even higher standards of virtuosity, notably Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (c.1620–80) in Vienna, Heinrich von Biber (1644–1704) in Salzburg, and (mainly in Dresden) Johann Jakob Walther (c.1650–1717) and Johann Paul von Westhoff (1656–1705). Schmelzer was described in 1660, with unusually frank qualification, as 'nearly the finest violinist in Europe', while a decade later Biber was said to be a 'formidable virtuoso' by the violin maker Stainer. The Austro-Germans took over and extended considerably the technical achievements of the early Italian school. In particular they made a speciality of double and multiple stops, enabling the performance of polyphonic music that looks forward to that of Bach. They have been subject to some of the same criticisms as the early Italian school, especially an over-reliance on technical effects and pictorial representation. But these they raised to a new artistic plane, by virtue of a more serious approach to structure and a more deeply felt musical expression (Italianate affective recitative can here be profoundly moving). Biber in particular transformed the programmatic concept in his 'Mystery' (or 'Rosary') sonatas (c.1675). The evidence of Biber's music suggests that he combined a brilliant technique and command of double stopping with an expressive intensity unmatched in the seventeenth century. Apart from the possible influence on Bach, however, the Austro-German school had no direct artistic progeny; they represent rather a late flowering of an early Baroque ideal.

England witnessed two revelatory visits by foreign violinists. Around 1655 the German-born Thomas Baltzar (c.1630–63) arrived from Sweden. Anthony Wood was astonished when Baltzar played up to the end of the fingerboard and back 'and all with alacrity and in very good tune'.[2] Towards the end of the century the Italian style made headway in England, with the arrival soon after 1670 of Nicola Matteis, 'that stupendious Violin ... whom certainly never mortal man Exceeded on that Instrument: he had a stroak so sweete, & made it speake like the Voice of a man; & when he pleased, like a Consort of severall Instruments.'[3] Purcell espoused the cause in his 1683 trio sonatas, written in 'just imitation of the most fam'd Italian Masters', by contrast with 'the levity, and balladry of our neighbours' across the Channel.

## Bologna and Corelli

In mid-century Italy something of a reaction set in against the extravagances of the early virtuosi. Bologna proved an important centre, with the basilica of San Petronio providing a focus for the development of instrumental music. In addition, the Accademia Filarmonica encouraged a serious approach to instrumental composition by its cultivation of

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contrapuntal writing (Corelli himself came into a famous dispute with the academicians over a passage of alleged consecutive fifths). A more sober-minded attitude towards the violin ensued, and composers such as Cazzati and G. B. Vitali (himself a string player) eschewed the technical emphasis of Uccellini at nearby Modena and Parma. Undoubtedly the most prominent violinist of the Bologna school was Giuseppe Torelli (1658–1709), known to us mainly for his pioneering violin concertos, but an even more important figure studied there: Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713). Though he spent most of his life in Rome, Corelli proudly recalled his upbringing by describing himself as 'il Bolognese' on title-pages.

We have contradictory views of his performance. Some thought his playing restrained to the point of mildness (as in Mainwaring's famous anecdote of Handel seizing Corelli's violin out of his hands). On the other hand, there is the following graphic description:

> I never met with any man that suffered his passions to hurry him away so much whilst he was playing on the violin as the famous Arcangelo Corelli, whose eyes will sometimes turn as red as fire; his countenance will be distorted, his eyeballs roll as in an agony, and he gives in so much to what he is doing that he doth not look like the same man.[4]

An important feature of his playing was the improvised ornamentation of those slow movements that appear so bald on the printed page (some embellished versions attributed to Corelli were printed in 1710, but their authorship was disputed almost as soon as they appeared).

Corelli represents a curious figure in the history of the violin. He was scarcely one of the great virtuosi of his day; he travelled little; his compositions were few and comparatively limited in scope. But his influence was immeasurable. Those few compositions, neatly packaged in four sets of trio sonatas, one of solo sonatas, and one (posthumously published) of concerti grossi, spread across Europe as the epitome of 'classical' Baroque composition. They were devoured by the English: the very first day that his concertos arrived in London, a bookseller interrupted a concert to show them to Henry Needler (an amateur violinist), whereupon 'the books were immediately laid out, and he and the rest of the performers played the whole twelve concertos through, without rising from their seats'.[5] Corelli was also widely respected as a leader, known for his discipline in ensuring uniform bowing.

Equally important, his teaching initiated the first major school of violin playing, the violinistic descendants of which can loosely be traced down to the present day. Among Corelli's students were Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762) and Giovanni Battista Somis (1686–1763), possibly also Francesco Maria Veracini (1690–1768) and Pietro Locatelli (1695–1764). No violinist can have escaped his influence – the early music of Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) and Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770) betrays a strong debt to Corelli. In unspoken homage to his teacher (and no doubt to make a tidy profit), Geminiani arranged many of Corelli's trio sonatas as concerti grossi, while Veracini paid him the more

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doubtful compliment of rewriting and updating the Op. 5 sonatas. Many of these violinists were directly responsible for spreading Corelli's influence throughout Europe, as will be seen. However, none was content simply to replicate Corelli's playing, for there were early developments in violin playing, as there were in musical language.

## Italian violin playing after Corelli

The decades after Corelli's death saw the conscious cultivation of the image of the virtuoso with such remarks as Veracini's 'there is but *one* God, and *one Veracini*' and Pugnani's 'with a violin in my hand I am Caesar'. Musically this was reflected in the invention of the violin concerto as a vehicle for soloistic display, in which development Vivaldi played a leading role. More fundamentally, violinists sought new types of musical expression, new heights of virtuosity, and a new range of sonority.

Expression, the ability to 'touch the heart', became a touchstone for true violinistic greatness, especially as musical taste moved into the age of sensibility. Even Geminiani and Veracini, perhaps closest to Corelli's aesthetic and technical means, were not immune. At first those English who revered the simplicity and purity of Corelli found Veracini's music 'too wild and flighty'.[6] But they were won round by Geminiani, who began to indicate subtle expressive nuances in his publications by means of dynamic shadings. He also drew on the art of refined ornamentation for similar ends: one section of his violin treatise (1751) explains 'all the Ornaments of Expression, necessary to the playing in a good Taste'. John Hawkins highlighted these qualities in Geminiani's playing: 'All the graces and elegancies of melody, all the powers that can engage attention, or that render the passions of the hearer subservient to the will of the artist, were united in his performance.'[7]

Tartini took the violin into a *galant* phase. Though best known now for the powerful and technically demanding 'Devil's Trill' Sonata (unpublished during his lifetime), Tartini in fact developed a highly expressive style of playing, noted for its cantabile manner, sensitive ornamentation and a certain pre-Romantic pathos (reflected in the poetic mottoes at the head of many of his works). These were qualities inherited and exaggerated by his favourite student, Pietro Nardini (1722–93), who deliberately disdained technical display in favour of a 'delicate, judicious, and highly finished' style.[8] The late-eighteenth-century German aesthetician C. F. D. Schubart left a romanticised description of Nardini:

> The tenderness of his playing is beyond description: every comma seems to be a declaration of love. His ability to touch the heart was quite extraordinary. Ice-cold princes and ladies were seen to cry when he performed an Adagio; often his own tears would fall on the violin as he played ... His bowstroke was slow and solemn; yet, unlike Tartini, he did not tear the notes out by the roots, but only kissed their tips. He detached

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them very slowly, and each note seemed like a drop of blood flowing from his tender soul.[9]

Nardini was clearly a player of unmatched sensitivity: nevertheless an expressive cantabile combined with elegant phrasing and ornamentation were regarded throughout the century as Italian characteristics.

After the comparatively restrained technical demands of Corelli's music, the quest for virtuoso brilliance was resumed. At its best, this was still part of the search for expression, for example in the widening range of bowing demands; and it could be contained satisfactorily within the secure tonal bounds of the concerto. But there was always the possibility of abuse. Critics repeatedly censured violinists for appealing to shallow public taste, in empty displays of execution and unmeaning ornamentation at the expense of genuine musical feeling. Even Vivaldi was regarded in this light by J. F. A. von Uffenbach, visiting Venice in 1715:

He added a cadenza that really frightened me, for such playing has not been heard before and can never be equalled: he brought his fingers no more than a straw's breadth from the bridge, leaving no room for the bow – and that on all four strings with imitations and incredible speed. With this he astonished everyone, but I cannot say that it delighted me, for it was more skilfully executed than it was pleasant to hear.[10]

But Vivaldi was easily outshone by Locatelli, whose playing reached unprecedented technical heights, to judge from the demands of his collection of concertos and caprices entitled *L'arte del violino* (1733). Some reports of his playing stress the demonic way in which he attacked the violin, and his trance-like appearance when performing. These attributes have led to comparisons with Nicolò Paganini, who avowedly built his technical achievements on those of Locatelli. The association has not always been meant kindly, but much of Locatelli's music is quite different from *L'arte* and of sufficient quality to allay doubts about his musicality.

Much less secure is the position of that other great showman, Antonio Lolli (c.1725–1802), regarded by many as the transcendent technician of the century. Giovanni Battista Rangoni, in a pamphlet comparing Nardini, Lolli and Pugnani, argued that Lolli's pyrotechnics, flitting from one extreme of the range to the other, were inevitably detrimental to musical expression.[11] The English, who prided themselves on their rejection of shallow musical stunts imported from the continent, thought him a charlatan:

LOLLI, as far outshone by Cramer and Giardini in the superior excellencies of the violin, *taste* and *pathos*, as he outdoes them in excentric oddity, trick, and voluble execution, is esteemed at the highest rate in some foreign countries . . . But not in Italy, nor, to the credit of our musical judgement, in England![12]

One consequence of these technical developments was the distancing of the professional player from the amateur market – even Tartini's sonatas Op. 1 were regarded as too difficult for most amateurs (which did not, however, prevent the most demanding music from reaching print).[13]

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A third concern of the eighteenth century was the cultivation of tone. In a general sense this was often seen as an ingredient of expression, liable to be found wanting in such performers as Lolli. Nardini was constantly praised: Leopold Mozart wrote that 'it would be impossible to hear a finer player for beauty, purity, evenness of tone and singing quality'.[14] But others consciously sought a larger sound, in line with the development of bigger orchestras and concert-halls. Somis, possessed of 'the most majestic bowstroke in Europe', was noted for his ability to sustain a single bow; and his Piedmont school prided itself on its sonorous tone-quality. Felice Giardini (1716–96), for example, had 'a tone so sweet, and at the same time so powerful, that he appeared to me to be performing on strings so large, I really thought his fingers must have been blistered by the necessary pressure he gave them'.[15] Gaetano Pugnani (1731–98) also preferred thicker strings; he inherited Somis's commanding style of bowing, which he in turn transmitted to Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755–1824), thus providing a direct link with the early-nineteenth-century French school.

## Italian violinists – profession and lifestyle

Many Italian violinists sought the patronage of the wealthy, a patronage which could take many different forms. Corelli, in Rome by 1675, was fortunate in the protection of three prominent patrons of the arts – Christina (former Queen of Sweden), Cardinal Pamphili and (from 1690) Cardinal Ottoboni. He would mostly have been heard at small concerts or 'academies' such as those on Monday evenings at Ottoboni's palace, attended by Rome's cultural elite. But he also led very large orchestras on special occasions, such as the 150 strings at an opulent entertainment laid on by Christina in 1687. At some such occasion around 1682 Georg Muffat heard concertos by Corelli 'beautifully performed with the utmost accuracy by a great number of instrumental players'.[16] To judge from his correspondence, Ottoboni treated Corelli more as a friend than as an employee. This charmed existence allowed Corelli the time to refine his compositions to perfection before publication (in this period of rapidly expanding markets they were quickly available from Rome to Amsterdam and London). He was accorded that signal honour, rare for the mere violinist, of the approval of the literary and artistic community, symbolised by his admission in 1706 to the Accademia dei Arcadi.

Violinists continued in demand at courts throughout Italy and German-speaking countries. Somis was principal violinist of the Turin *cappella*, responsible for leading concerts and church music, and later the famous opera orchestra.[17] His most celebrated student, Pugnani, was also associated with the court throughout his life, rising from the back desk of the second violins (at the age of ten) to leader in 1770 (rather belatedly it might be thought). Other Italians found their way to courts

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north of the Alps: Nardini, for example, was principal violinist at the Stuttgart court in the early 1760s, before returning to a prestigious post at the ducal court of Florence. But the average *émigré* could scarcely entertain such aspirations. Thus Luigi Tomasini (for whom Haydn wrote at least one of his concertos) began his employment at the Esterházy court as a *valet-de-chambre*; later as leader of the court orchestra he was only modestly paid, remaining essentially a liveried servant with strict conditions of service.

Another form of secure employment was a teaching post. In 1703 Vivaldi was appointed *maestro di violino* at the Ospedale della Pietà, a Venetian orphanage for girls which gave strong emphasis to musical education, and whose chapel music attracted large congregations. Vivaldi's duties included instrumental teaching, the provision of new concertos, and the training of the orchestra, which evidently achieved a surprisingly high standard. But his relationship with the Pietà was not a smooth one, as will be seen.

Tartini, too, made a profession out of teaching. While remaining first violinist at the cathedral of San Antonio in Padua, he founded a school of violin instruction in 1727 or 1728 (sometimes known as the 'School of Nations'). This should not be thought of as a conservatoire in a modern sense, but it is clear that Tartini developed a serious training programme for young violinists: nine or so students were enrolled for a ten-month year, at least two of whom he taught for no fee, though even with only four or five students he 'felt like the most worried man on earth'.[18] Some of his ideas are expounded in his *Regole per arrivare a saper ben suonar il violino* (transmitted by a student, and posthumously published as *Traité des agrémens*). More informal but equally revealing is a letter of 1760 to Maddalena Sirmen, née Lombardini (the first woman violinist of European fame). Around seventy of his students, from all over Europe, have been identified: many of the compositions of this school, together with ornamentations of Tartini slow movements, are in a collection at the University of California, Berkeley.

Few Italian violinists were content with the relatively narrow confines and low profile of court life, and the freedom to travel was sometimes written into a contract. Pugnani, for example, made regular forays into the public arenas of Northern Europe, playing at concerts in Paris in 1754, writing operas for London in 1769 and 1773. It was on an extended European concert tour with Viotti that the latter left for Paris in 1782, with momentous consequences for the history of the violin. Vivaldi, too, was notoriously lax about his teaching duties. Already in the 1710s he was devoting much of his attention to opera, and a rising chorus of complaint resulted in the loss of his teaching post in 1716. However, he retained some connection with the Pietà throughout his life, even when his operas and violin playing took him all over Italy and as far north as Amsterdam. Thus in 1723 he was invited to contribute two new concer-

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tos every month, which he might send by post, and to direct rehearsals when in Venice.

Others sacrificed the security of a court post for the enticing prospects offered by the capitals of Northern Europe. Locatelli settled in 1729 in Amsterdam – where he spurned professional performance in favour of concerts with the wealthy bourgeoisie. He likewise taught only amateurs, preferring to pass on his violinistic achievement through the purely musical *L'arte del violino*. He also contributed to Amsterdam's thriving music-publishing industry, in which he was remarkable for bringing out much of his music at his own expense.

English money lured many of Europe's finest violinists to London at some time during the century. Opportunities here for the enterprising were unrivalled: as Johann Mattheson wrote from Germany in 1713, 'he who at the present time wants to make a profit out of music betakes himself to England'.[19] Roger North quipped that England had 'dispeopled Italy of viollins', and the situation had changed little seventy years later: 'Many foreign singers, fidlers, and dancers, are extravagantly paid; and, if they are the least frugal, they are enabled to retire to their own country, where they may live in affluence, enriched by English money.'[20]

By far the most famous Italian to settle in London in the first half of the century was Geminiani, who arrived in 1714. After initial success, however, he was seldom heard in public, but 'his compositions, scholars, and the presents he received from the great, whenever he could be prevailed upon to play at their houses, were his chief support'.[21] Among these students was Matthew Dubourg, who led the first performance of *Messiah* in Dublin in 1742. Geminiani's teaching methods are explained in the *Art of Playing on the Violin* (1751), a valuable source, though its brief and enigmatic explanations of certain technical matters must have been as perplexing to the gentleman violinist then as they are to us today.

Perhaps Geminiani's reticence was caused by the 'unsteady manner' that Burney found in his leading of an orchestra in 1749. He never played in Handel's orchestra, which was led instead by two other students of Corelli – Pietro Castrucci (whose brother is thought to have been the 'enraged musician' of Hogarth's print) and Giovanni Stefano Carbonelli. But in general violin playing in London seems to have languished, for Giardini's modern style of playing caused a sensation there in 1751. His playing 'threw into the utmost astonishment the whole company, who had never been accustomed to hear better performers than *Festing*, *Brown*, and *Collet*!'; and at his public debut the applause was 'so loud, long, and furious, as nothing but that bestowed on Garrick had ever equalled'.[22] Giardini transformed the playing of the Italian opera orchestra, and took a major role in London's concert and operatic life for the next thirty years.

With the growth of international travel during the eighteenth century, some Italian violinists moved towards the more volatile lifestyle of the

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travelling virtuoso. These international stars were considerably reliant on public support (and the consequent whims of fashion); it was a highly competitive world, as the continual comparisons make clear:

The Connoisseurs in Italy have dubbed Signor Lolli Prince of the Fiddlers; after him they place Nardini, Pugnani, and Crammer; but should they hear Mr. La Motte, they would undoubtedly judge him equal if not to Lolli, at least to the others. We do not forget the Merit of Signor Giardini, who among us is deemed a very eminent Fiddler; but we mean only to relate the Opinion of the Professors of Music all over Italy.[23]

Violinists might organise their own concerts (like today's pianists, they were second only to singers in public esteem). But they still courted patronage, whether or not this involved a recognised title or post. Such a lifestyle was precarious: if there were great riches to be gained, there were also great risks (especially as many dabbled in risky operatic ventures). And violinists like everyone else were subject to political upheavals: Viotti felt compelled to leave Paris for London in 1792, being associated with Marie Antoinette – only to be deported from England in 1798, suspected of being a Jacobin activist.

Several Italians did not settle in one particular place. Veracini, for example, though he did retain some ties with Florence, toured Europe during the 1710s, took a court post at Dresden from 1717 to 1722, and was resident in London on three separate occasions. Giornovichi and Viotti had strikingly similar careers, involving some years in Eastern Europe, a decade in Paris (the 1770s and 1780s respectively), and recourse to London in the 1790s. But the archetypal travelling virtuoso must be Lolli, whose life was a typically fluid mixture of court posts and independent concert touring. He held positions at Stuttgart (1758–74) and St Petersburg (1774–83), but was granted numerous extended leaves of absence, enabling him to give concerts in Vienna, Paris, Germany, Italy, Poland and Scandinavia. One such leave expanded to over two years, to the distinct annoyance of the Russian court. In 1785 he was in London, and thereafter seems to have continued to tour Europe without any permanent post.

## Germany and Austria in the eighteenth century

Although many German courts were under the influence of French culture, and imitated Versailles in taste and decoration, Italian music retained the strong hold it had built up during the seventeenth century. Johann Georg Pisendel (1687–1755), for example, was taught the violin by Torelli at Ansbach, before joining the Dresden court orchestra in 1712; four years later he was in Venice, where he studied with Vivaldi. He returned to Dresden with a collection of Vivaldi's music, thus contributing to its rapid dissemination during this decade. (Bach in Weimar was already familiar with the concertos entitled *L'estro armonico*, two of which he arranged for organ.) There is an unsubstantiated tradition that,

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on a visit to Dresden in 1717, Bach may have heard Pisendel play an unaccompanied violin sonata, and even that Bach may have intended his own set for Pisendel. Among Pisendel's students was Franz Benda (1709–86), the most prominent violinist at the Berlin court of Frederick the Great. Though the unvarying taste and routine of the King had a stultifying effect on some, Benda and C. P. E. Bach 'dared to have a style of their own', in the opinion of Charles Burney, who was impressed by the pathos of Benda's Adagio playing.[24]

As North German courts drew back financially after the Seven Years War, the artistic focus moved southwards. Especially prominent was the Mannheim court, where the orchestra achieved a European reputation under the direction of Johann Stamitz (1717–57). The Bohemian violinist was renowned for his role in developing a vivid and energetic style of string playing in tune with the emerging symphonic idiom. He was succeeded by Christian Cannabich (1731–98), whose exceptional qualities as a leader inspired 'the love and awe of those under him', according to Mozart.[25] Stamitz's son Carl (1745–1801) was also a violinist, but he was more celebrated as the first international soloist on the viola.

For the first time German and Bohemian violinists began to exert a major influence outside the German-speaking countries. Stamitz himself visited Paris in 1754–5 with success. In London, where concerts began to focus on the Austro-German symphonic repertory, the Italian domination began to crumble. The Mannheimer Wilhelm Cramer (1746–99) was invited to London in 1772 specifically to lead the orchestra of the Bach–Abel concerts; he founded the excellent orchestra of the Professional Concert in 1785. Johann Peter Salomon (1745–1815), said to have been a student of Benda, moved to London in 1782 and was responsible for Haydn's arrival there in 1791. Cramer in particular was noted for the fire and spirit of his playing, which eventually usurped Giardini's graceful Italianate cantabile. Both Cramer and Salomon, though acknowledged virtuosi, increasingly specialised in orchestral leading, in which Cramer was unsurpassed. Salomon excelled in chamber music (a popular feature of London's concerts), and was the inspiration for Haydn's brilliant concert quartets of Op. 71 and Op. 74.

In 1756, Leopold Mozart published his celebrated *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, not in Salzburg but in the South German city of Augsburg. Somewhat indebted to material by Tartini (then unpublished), it represents by far the most comprehensive violin treatise of its time, and it continued to be highly influential with a third edition appearing in 1787. Mozart *fils* was himself trained as a violinist (his concertos were probably intended for himself, not for Antonio Brunetti as once thought), but he maintained a firm stance against his father's ambitions in this regard. In later life he preferred to play the viola, as on the famous occasion witnessed by Michael Kelly, when

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Haydn, Dittersdorf, Mozart and Vanhal played for an informal quartet party.[26]

## France in the eighteenth century

Most complex was the situation in France, where resistance to the Italian violin school and its genres persisted well into the eighteenth century. Indeed the violin itself was still under suspicion in 1740, when Hubert Le Blanc published a defence of the bass viol 'contre les entreprises du violon et les prétentions du violoncel'. Partly this was a matter of national pride (the violin was as much a symbol of foreign intervention as was Italian opera). Partly it was a question of musical taste, for both the mechanical fireworks and the emotional intensity of the Italian Baroque were out of line with the French aesthetic.

However, the bastions were to fall (as they did not in the opera-house). The early decades of the century saw a spate of sonata composition by violinists associated with the French court, such as François Duval, Jean-Féry Rebel and Jean Baptiste Senaillé. Links between France and the Turin court were encouraged when the Prince of Carignan moved to the French capital in 1718, and several of Somis's students settled in Paris, with its flourishing concert life and publishing markets. Somis himself played in 1733 at the Concert Spirituel, the prestigious series of concerts on religious holidays. In addition the private concerts of La Pouplinière (from 1731 to 1762) popularised Italian instrumental music.

Even more significantly, several Frenchmen studied with Somis in Turin. The most important of these was undoubtedly Jean-Marie Leclair (1697–1764), the foremost French violinist of the first half of the century. To judge from his sonatas, Leclair's playing formed a remarkable blend of Italian expression with Gallic charm. Some found the precision of his playing somewhat cold, though one contemporary attributed this to 'an excess of taste rather than a want of boldness and freedom'.[27] He was especially renowned for his accurate playing of double stops; indeed, these, rather than the high figuration of the Italians, provide the principal technical demand of his music.

Leclair, though highly esteemed, seems to have been less than skilful in political manipulation, and he never achieved the court favour accorded to another Somis student. The Italian Jean-Pierre Guignon (1702–74), originally Ghignone, was introduced in 1725 at the newly established Concert Spirituel. The foreign influx had provoked the inevitable rivalry, and the occasion was set up as a competition with the Frenchman Jean-Jacques-Baptiste Anet (1676–1755), curiously enough a student of Corelli. Witnesses recorded an honourable draw, but it was Guignon who went on to attain the greater prestige: in 1741 Louis XV was even persuaded to revive the dormant position of *roi des violons* for him.

Despite Guignon's success it remained inadvisable to overemphasise

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an Italian connection. André-Noël Pagin (b.1721), prominent at the Concert Spirituel from 1747 to 1750, played the music of his teacher Tartini almost exclusively (he also edited several sets of his sonatas). But according to his own testimony he was hissed 'for daring to play in the Italian style, and this was the reason of his quitting the profession'.[28] No doubt he suffered also from comparison with Pierre Gaviniès (1728–1800), a French violinist of the highest class and a major figure in Paris throughout the second half of the century. Possibly a student of Leclair, Gaviniès was a popular performer at the Concert Spirituel in the years around 1750 with his concertos in the incipient Classical style. In 1762 he was appointed leader, as part of a revitalisation of the orchestra, and eleven years later he became co-director with Gossec and Leduc.

The orchestra of the Concert Spirituel, which had been formed to accompany French motets, was somewhat slow to reflect modern practices suitable for Classical symphonies: only with the reforms of 1762 was the audible beating of time abandoned. In 1777 the leadership passed to yet another student of Tartini, Pierre Lahoussaye (1735–1818), but Mozart found the orchestra still insecure:

> I was very anxious at the rehearsal, for I have never heard anything worse in all my life; you cannot imagine how they twice bumbled and scraped through the symphony ... [I was] determined that if it went as badly as at the rehearsal, I should certainly go up to the orchestra, take the violin from the hands of Lahoussaye, the leader, and direct it myself![29]

In the end, however, the 'Paris' symphony scored a resounding success, its arresting opening ably showing off the legendary attack of the orchestra's *premier coup d'archet* (literally 'first bowstroke'). Paris also supported another concert series, the Concert des Amateurs. Founded in 1769 by Gossec for the performance of modern symphonic repertory, its standards were much higher. The large orchestra was led by the extrovert Chevalier de Saint-Georges, part West Indian, who was as well known for his fencing as for his musical talents. The series was succeeded in the 1780s by the Concert de la Loge Olympique, for which Haydn composed his six 'Paris' symphonies.

In the course of only a few decades Paris had become established as a cosmopolitan centre for European violin playing. The often forward-looking *Principes du violon* by L'abbé *le fils* was published there in 1761. Opportunities for concert performance were rivalled only by those in London, and there was an even more thriving publishing industry: indeed the majority of the most difficult violin concertos were published here. Paris was certainly perceived as the focus of violinistic virtuosity – witness Cramer's amazement at rank-and-file violinists at the Concert Spirituel 'flourishing the most difficult passages up to the top of the finger-board'.[30] One of the consequences of this international confluence was a breakdown of the national schools, at least temporarily.

The foremost Parisian violinist of the 1770s was Giovanni Mane

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Giornovichi (c.1740–1804), perhaps the outstanding violinist of the mid Classical era. Even his country of birth is unclear (he was also known as Jarnowick), though he seems to have studied in Italy, possibly with Lolli. Whatever his origins, Giornovichi's playing seems to typify the musical life of Paris during this decade. He combined a brilliant if facile virtuosity with a polished and elegant manner; for slow movements he favoured the graceful romance and for finales the piquant rondo. Equally characteristically, the same decade saw the sudden rise of the agreeable and colourful *symphonie concertante*, a genre which was cultivated with a frenzy of enthusiasm.

But this undemanding musical *milieu* was not to last. Viotti's first performance at the Concert Spirituel on 17 March 1782 caused a sensation. Virtually single-handedly Viotti was to change the course of violin playing during the 1780s. His excellent technique was taken for granted (and he was no doubt exceeded in violinistic trickery by Lamotte and Lolli). What struck audiences was the grand and forceful manner of his bowing (derived from Pugnani), and his rich expressive tone – both enhanced by his preference for a Stradivari violin and the new bow developed by Tourte. He particularly exploited the sonorous qualities of the lowest string and the soaring aspirations of the highest; and he was renowned for the noble cantabile of his Adagio playing. Even virtuosity was used less for decorative display, with signs of a more assertive rhetoric and bravura. Altogether Viotti attempted a more serious approach to the whole concept of violin performance, reflected in the number of minor-key concertos he published. In this his playing was in accord with the bolder drama of current French operatic taste (as represented by his friend Cherubini) and also with Haydn's symphonic style.

After sweeping all opposition before him for two seasons, Viotti unexpectedly abandoned the public platform. Instead, he played at select private concerts, including those of Queen Marie Antoinette; he also gave concerts at his own lodgings, to which admittance was highly prized. Towards the end of the decade he became involved in opera management, with some success, before circumstances forced his departure for England in 1792. In London Viotti moderated the virtuoso element of his concertos, but he maintained the expressive intensity and bold imagination, pleasing those harsh critics who had so consistently complained about the empty display of his predecessors:

> It is impossible to speak of [Viotti's] performance in common terms, and therefore we may be pardoned the rhapsody. His execution is not more astonishing by its difficulty, than it is delightful by its passion. He not only strikes the senses with wonder, but he touches the heart with emotion.[31]

One critic ventured a direct comparison. By contrast with the 'always delightful, finished and elegant' playing of Giornovichi, he found Viotti 'original and sublime – he reaches at unattempted grandeur'.[32] This unmistakably Romantic image assuredly looks towards the next century.

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