LONDON CELLO SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

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From Servant to Superstar

The Changing Role of the Virtuoso Cellist
Part 1

• *Valerie Walden*

Bernhard Romberg

21st century commentators use numerous superlatives to describe the playing of inspirational violoncellists. The hundreds of finely-trained players of earlier centuries, as well as many of us, are characterized as amazing, dazzling, brilliant, superb, or charismatic players. However, none of these descriptors hold the prestige power of the term 'virtuoso'. For contemporary players, virtuoso is the highest praise that one can achieve; an accolade for the best of the best. Like the players characterized by the term, virtuoso is an interesting word whose meaning has altered as much over time as the players who deserve the characterization of its modern definition.

The violoncello is a late 15th century creation, but little is known about its 15th and 16th century practitioners. Following Aristotelian logic, no person of standing at that time would have wanted to be thought of as a virtuoso performer and those of the servant class, in which most cellists belonged, were apparently unremarkable to those they served. Virtuoso musicians of this period were composers, theorists, or renowned maestros, not cello accompanists. It is only at the end of the 17th century, with the first publications of cello solos, that players began to leave evidence of their achievements, although the idea of a virtuoso cellist would still have been considered ludicrous. Only a few players, such as Francesco Alborea (1691-1739), aka Franciscello, were accorded public recognition, the approbation for his abilities as an outstanding player demonstrated by the linking of his instrument's appellation to his own name. Although he composed solo works, he was famous for his accompanying and obbligato skills, which received laudatory comments by such musicians as Quantz, Geminiani,

and Franz Benda. An additional indicator of his renown is the hallmark of viola da gambists travelling long distances to study with him in order to learn the cello, disciples including Jean Barrière (c. 1705-1747) and Martin Berteau (1709-1771).

By the early 18th century, although still obscure, cellists were entering the world of virtuoso accomplishment by composing and performing solos. Salvatore Lanzetti (c. 1710-c. 1780) met the standards of the early definition of virtuosity. The author of the first instruction manual for his instrument, he composed solo works and performed them throughout Europe. An early adopter of thumb position, his sonatas also demonstrate fluency of double-stopping and exceptional bow mastery. An obituary reference noted that he was "famous" in Paris for his unequalled execution. His sonatas, all published between 1733 and 1740, demonstrate a myriad of string crossing challenges and the trespassing of cello notes into the violin register that certainly must have challenged contemporary notions of how the cello was played.

Proving that the cello was as versatile an instrument for solos as the violin was the benchmark of mid-to-late 18th century cello virtuosity as the word itself came to be associated with those who gained renown as soloists. With his father's support, Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805) began his career by supplementing orchestral playing with public solo performances. His father died when he was 23 and Boccherini further extended this supplementation by writing solo concertos for his own performance, as well as establishing the cello as an equal partner in chamber music. As with Franciscello, another indicator of his contemporaries' high regard for him was Boccherini's idolisation by a younger group of musicians, who in turn would themselves become virtuoso performers. Not only did such cellists as J.P. Duport and Bernard Romberg seek out Boccherini, but so, too, did young violinists and keyboard players, including Pierre Rode, Pierre Baillot, and Sophie Gail. His virtuosity can be measured by the difficulty of his compositions, the success of his concerts, and the social standing of the kings and princes for whom he wrote music.

Boccherini composed twelve cello concertos that are thought to have been his performance literature around 1770. Together with Haydn's C major concerto, which was written c. 1765, these works demonstrate 18th century technical acrobatics that both Boccherini and Haydn's court cellist, Joseph Weigl (1740-1820), must have found comfortable. The tessitura of the melodies extends to the end of the fingerboards of the period and both composers happily require thumb position double stops that were uncommon at the time. Little is known of Weigl's life because he didn't compose or tour, but it can be surmised that Haydn considered him an extraordinary player if he composed Weigl a concerto of such difficulty, given the limited rehearsal and performance opportunities of their work structure. Weigl left Esterhazy employment after 1769 to work as a principal cellist in Vienna.

The 1770s and 1780s were transformational years in instrument and bow design and corresponding methods of composing and playing. Reports indicate that 'old' and 'new' styles of performance co-existed, the playing styles of Jean-Pierre (1741-1818) and Jean-Louis (1749-1819) Duport serving as a publicised example. Students of Berteau, they were the most admired cellists in Paris before both eventually moved to Berlin. J.P. left in 1774 to become director of chamber music at the Prussian court, while J.L. took refuge from the French Revolution in 1790. Ernst Ludwig Gerber described their dichotomy of virtuosity:

> Those who have heard both brothers side by side are easily convinced that the older brother is a perfect virtuoso out of the old French school, which above all sought the greatest expression, and the younger is an equal virtuoso of the new French school. The elder is evenly accomplished in dexterity and precision, in a large full sound and power and expression in performance.

Jean-Louis was a cellist especially associated with use of the bow designs of François Tourte and a close friend of the influential violin virtuoso G.B. Viotti. Duport's playing was recognized for its beauty of sound, his bowing dexterity and the organization of fingering patterns specific to the cello. His concertos demonstrate that his particular expertise was thumb position octaves, but other challenges include the high range of the music, a myriad of string crossing patterns and the use of upper register natural harmonics. Beethoven was quoted by J.F. Reichardt as saying that Duport gave him the greatest pleasure of any instrumentalist.

A contemporary proponent of thumb position octaves, arpeggio figurations and double stops was Antonin Kraft (1749-1820). His facility is witnessed not only through his own compositions, but by his premiering of both Haydn's works, including the D major concerto, and many of Beethoven's. Kraft was employed at Esterhazy from 1779 until Prince Nicholas's death in 1790. Kraft then moved to Vienna, where he was employed by Prince Lichnowsky, as well as other aristocratic patrons.

The changing image of cello virtuosity over the course of the 18th century is dramatically measured when looking at the performance practices of the cellist most widely travelled, published and emulated, Bernard Romberg (1767-1841). Described by the end of his career as the "king of

violoncellists", Romberg altered the cello's structure and image. Growing up with music as the family business, Romberg began playing concerts at age 13. Joining the Bonn Kapelle with his family in 1790, Romberg completed his early training alongside Beethoven and maintained their friendship throughout Beethoven's lifetime, debuting the op. 5 sonatas with Beethoven at their Vienna premiere. Romberg's concept of how the cello should be played necessitated changes to the instrument itself. Amongst the first performers to introduce Tourte bows to audiences outside of Paris, Romberg's broadening of the cello's range to include the upper register of the G and C strings, as well as the increased leverage he put into the strings by the use of the heretofore unusual bow hold at the frog (an idea borrowed from Viotti and his French violin school), led him to shape the wood out from underneath the C string side of the fingerboard. This allowed for unobstructed vibrations of the lowest string. Because his writing for the instrument expanded playing techniques so far beyond the norm, Romberg also felt it necessary to notate his published music with greater instructional detail than composers had previously done, altering the notation to include a signature symbol for the thumb and clef usage that has been considered standard cello notation ever since.

All of these changes to music and instrument do not in themselves prove that Romberg was a virtuoso cellist– his audiences were evidence enough and, as with earlier virtuosos, the adulation of students who went out of their way to find him and study his playing strategies. Performing from memory, a novelty at the time, was a signature component of his connection with an audience. As a young cellist, it was reported that his playing combined "extraordinary rapidity with charming rendering" with a sound that was "clear, firm, and penetrating." He so shook up the expectations of contemporaries that by the mid-point of his career, some were actually questioning whether it was proper for the cello to be used as a solo instrument in this manner. The authors of the Paris Conservatoire cello method, who included violinist Baillot and Conservatoire cello teacher Charles Baudio–both avid fans of Boccherini chamber music, wrote:

> If one wants to make a virtue of difficulty, it [the violoncello] lends itself to all the advantages of modulation, double-stops, arpeggios and harmonics. But there are limits which may not be exceeded; the gravity of its progress does not permit it all the intemperate movements taken on the violin… The desire to innovate will sometimes intrude to spoil everything, making useless additions, encroaching on the domain of others, tormenting art for the sake of art, causing its degeneration while trying to improve it….

Did succeeding cellists pay any attention to such censure? How would cello virtuosity be viewed by subsequent generations?

Part II of this article will be published in the Autumn 2016 issue of the newsletter.

Of Special Interest

Maud Martin-Tortelier

• *Richard Markson*

I was thirteen when Paul Tortelier introduced me to his wife. He had invited me to Paris for a lesson and my mother had accompanied me. After introductions Maud thanked my mother for looking after her husband in Glasgow. "It was a pleasure", said my mother. Glancing up at her husband who towered over her diminutive frame, she fixed my mother with a knowing stare: "Not *such* a pleasure!" was her qualified response, delivered with a twinkle in her eye.

The twinkle in her eye was the key to many things. The Torteliers enlivened every conversation with humour: He, the actor, comedian, marvellous raconteur; she, contributing the impish sense of fun. That's when they weren't arguing of course, which they did frequently, colourfully and vociferously. Maud was his muse—a fount of love, wisdom and strength that liberated his flamboyantly creative imagination, but with the capacity to bring him back to Planet Earth when required. Although as a cellist she possessed uniquely precious qualities of her own, she willingly subjugated her professional ambitions to those of her husband. She was fond of telling the story of how it all began:

The *Premier Prix* – the final exam before graduation at the Paris Conservatoire – included a 'Morceau Imposé', a new composition that none of the candidates could have studied beforehand. In Maud's final this was provided by Paul Tortelier.

Maud Martin-Tortelier

It was an acrobatic piece requiring a large hand to facilitate wide extensions in thumb position. Maud's hand, as she never missed an opportunity to remind us in later years, was small! Her chances presumed scuppered, her classmates lined up to commiserate. One member of the jury however – the composer – captivated by the graceful abandon with which, by necessity, she elegantly leapt around the instrument, preferred her playing to the others. The rest is history.

She idolised her husband as a cellist, although the idolatry did not extend to working with him. Her earliest cellistic influence, notably in the elegant fluidity of her bow arm and mellowness of tone, was from Pierre Fournier with whom she studied initially at the Conservatoire. Shortly after her marriage she once again approached Fournier for lessons."But my dear", he exclaimed, "You have Paul!" to which she replied: "I cannot possibly study with HIM!" Not that this in any way dampened her ability to offer her opinion, solicited or otherwise. I was turning pages for Paul's Erato recording of the Vivaldi sonatas when suddenly Maud appeared from the recording box gesticulating: "But use your third finger, for God's sake!"

Paul relied heavily on his wife's opinion. When prior to his recording the Bach Suites she advised him to go back to the drawing board and relearn them with metronome and without vibrato, he did as instructed. On another occasion, sharing my bemusement at the continued success of one of his celebrated cello compatriots he remarked wistfully that his colleague simply had not had the advantage of a wife who was a cellist.

Following Paul's death, Maud found her professional activities curtailed. As she jested that she had been buried with her husband, we were privileged to entice her to London for a series of master classes. These included Ševčík's 40 Variations for which Trinity College of Music's entire strings department had been mobilised into participation. I vividly recall her transformation of these exercises into music. "You must make *musique* with the *technique*!" was her constant refrain, as she provided particular insight into the organic fusion of timing, phrasing, breathing and body language.

Less accustomed to master classes than her husband, she insisted on advance knowledge of the repertoire to be performed. When without warning a student substituted the Elgar concerto for what had originally been programmed, she fretted about her unpreparedness. In the event, without reference to the score, she demonstrated the concerto compellingly and movingly. Later over dinner when I put to her that she clearly knew the work well, her eyes moistened as she explained how she had always loved the concerto but had never had the opportunity to perform it.

I am no impresario but I busied myself on the phone to Brazil. Later that year the Rio International Cello Encounter was planning a tribute to Paul Tortelier with Maud as the guest of honour. Already scheduled was his Double Concerto. "Could she also play Elgar?" "Only if she performs it in the same concert", I was informed. It would be a *tour de force* that some of us worried might prove too much for her, but she accepted.

She was not happy to discover at the last minute that the concert would be televised live throughout Brazil, but it was a spectacular success. Her playing was compelling, both in the poetic lyricism of her Elgar and in the Double Concerto, in which I was tasked with substituting for her husband, a true homage to his legacy. As we were leaving the stage of Sala Cecília Meireles to tumultuous applause, she sighed contentedly. "He" would have been pleased, she affirmed, before adding that this would be her last concert—and it was.

Unlocking the World Inside...

• *Shirley Smart*

Beyond Cello is a new division of the London Cello Society dedicated to exploring new ways and contexts for the cello.
It is a great honour and pleasure for me to have been invited by the Society to co-ordinate and run the division, and I would like to share some of our plans and events with you.

From September 2016, we will be running a bi-weekly improvisation course, aimed at developing creative skills for cellists of all ages. The course will be explore a range of ideas and musical styles, including jazz, gypsy jazz, free improvisation, improvisation in classical contexts and world music traditions including North Africa, the Middle East, Balkans and Latin America.

The cello, probably due to practical factors of size and expense, has not travelled so easily and consequently has not developed so extensively outside of the Western classical tradition as our little cousin the violin, which has already a rich history behind it in many traditions. It also an established improvising role—think of familiar names such as Stéphane Grappelli, Stuff Smith or Didier Lockwood in jazz for example, Sangeeta Shankar and Jyotsna Srinkath in Indian music, Ahmed al-Hifnawi and Simon Shaheen in classical Arabic music and numerous others all over the globe.

The untapped musical potential of the cello, however, is enormous – it can play a bass role, melody or accompanying counter role, andswitch fluently between roles, giving new impetus to a duo/small group context, and leaving us with many opportunities to explore and develop. Why should violinists have all the fun?

In addition to the purely instrumental reasons for developing improvising skills, there is also the changing nature of the musical profession, for those wishing to go into it. The ability to improvise, an awareness of different musical styles, and the flexibility and adaptability that tends to develop with improvisational skills is a valuable asset to the professional musician, as well as being enormous fun.

The course will be open to cellists with little or no experience in improvisation as well as those who would like to develop existing skills further, so please don't be shy!

Shirley Smart

I would like at this point to share a little of my own experiences with you, before inviting you to join us in our new venture.

Like the majority of string players, I was originally classically trainedat the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. While I was there I discovered many things, but particularly a fascination with the noises emanating from the Basement…or the home of the Jazz Department. For various reasons, I did not get the opportunity to pursue this any further at that time, instead taking up a scholarship offer to study in Jerusalem (the result of a wine-infused conversation round a snooker table in Canada, but that is a different story).

I had no knowledge of the Middle East whatsoever, so I found it on the map, and got on the plane. It seemed like a good idea at the time, and, as I figured, if I didn't like it, there were return flights….

I ended up staying there for 10 years, during which I encountered some amazing and fascinating musicians from a huge range of backgrounds and traditions, and was fortunate enough to perform, study and live with music from North Africa, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Yemen as well as some of the fine jazz musicians living in Jerusalem.

The last classical performance that I played will stay in my mind as my introduction to this world, which I now consider my musical home. I was playing

Schubert String Trios in a café in the centre of Jerusalem. During the first set, I noticed an intriguing looking character lurking at the back, and in the break, I turned round to find him standing by my shoulder.

"You" he said, in pretty heavily accented English "Do you want to play some Moroccan Jazz?"

Me : " Er……..yeah", and as I considered the fact that I had no idea what that meant, I left to go and meet the rest of the band that evening—a thoroughly marvellous, eccentric and lively bunch of Jewish and Arabic musicians, with whom I played for the next 9 years, who become lifelong friends, and through whom I was introduced to a whole new world.

I like it when things like this happen—it reminds me that the world is unlimited in its possibilities, that learning is not confined to institutions, a fine job though they often do, and that there is so much around us inour everyday lives through which we can keep developing.

One of the exciting things about the UK music scene now is its diversity and cosmopolitanism. Since returning from Jerusalem, I have enjoyed working with some of the great world music and jazz musicians here in Great Britain, and I very much hope that this course can offer something unique for young cellists to explore and discover for themselves.

As a prelude to the improvisation course outlined above, we will be holding an introductory session in May 2016. This should be a great opportunity to come along, ask any questions that you may have about the course, or improvising in general--or let me know anything you would be particularly interested in learning.

A Beyond Cello Festival Day is planned for 2017, with workshops by myself and others, as well as a concert and cabaret performance with some of the UK's leading cellists.

A full syllabus and further information will be available soon, and I'll be introducing a blog to the site as we go along on the Beyond Cello page of the LCS website. You can also follow our news on Facebook via the link below.

• Beyond Cello page - http://www.londoncellos.org/beyond-cello/
• Facebook Page - https://www.facebook.com/Beyond-Cello-531988730304099/?fref=ts
• Concert Invitation

Cello Talk

The Breathing Body, The Breathing Bow

• *Ruth Phillips*

I often ask string players if anyone ever mentioned breathing to them in connection with their playing. The answer, usually, is no. In my own life as a cellist I was sometimes encouraged to breathe (catch my breath?) 'between phrases', or told not to hold it. Playing the cello was something my fingers did to try and communicate ideas I had in my head and, maybe, even a feeling I had in my heart. (Though how my heart would find its way into my fingers I had no idea.) My experience of playing the cello, especially on stage, was disjointed and uncomfortable. My problem, as I see it now, was one of embodiment, and the key to its solution has been (and continues, in my cello, yoga and meditation practice, to be) the breath.

There are several etymological connections between breath and spirit: The Latin 'psyche' means animating spirit whilst 'spiritus' means breath. In Hebrew 'ruach' means wind, breath or spirit. The Greek *psykhe*, means soul, mind, spirit, breath and life and is described in one dictionary thus: *The invisible animating principle or entity, which occupies and directs the physical body.*


Ruth Phillips

It was through yoga that I first experienced the breath 'directing the physical body'. I had thought, hitherto, that our instrumental practice was a process of gaining more and more control, and the new experience of the breath creating space for release

The Breathing Body, The Breathing Bow

and thus for movement was a revelation that changed my playing completely.

Over the next ten years, I developed an approach called *The Breathing Bow*. It is nothing new. Drawing on ancient practices and organic principles, it is inspired by the many musicians I have had the privilege to work and play with. The breath is experienced as the common element, which unifies and brings into balance the physical, mental, musical, emotional and spiritual realms: through a series of exercises the expansion and contraction of the rib cage become the seed of the bow's movement; paying attention to the breath frees us from crippling inner judgment; the shape of the breath informs the shape of the phrase; hyper and hypo ventilation are calmed through breath work; a quiet observing mind is cultivated to liberate us from ego attachment. My aim is to help my client become an embodied musician, one who plays with ease, economy and enjoyment, who freely communicates with her audience and who feels more like she is 'being played 'rather than playing.

Always curious about how my approach ties in with other disciplines, and following on from some lively discussions at my home in Provence, I asked Dale Culliford (a friend, cellist in the Hallé and Alexander Technique teacher) to collaborate with me on a *Breathing Bow* workshop. It took place in November in New Mills, near Manchester. Professional, amateur and student cellists attended and as the introductions unfolded it appeared we had a bright array of issues in the room: one person wanted to leave his head backstage, another was breathing so fast he could not bring his bow to the string, a third was incapable of release and a fourth had so much inner commentary he was unable to listen enough to play in tune. Solutions that we explored ranged from learning, through a short meditation, to listen without judgment, using the in and out-breaths to experience the different qualities of gesture and follow-through, tension and release, and locating the impulse to play deep in one's centre before using the breath to carry that impulse through into movement. All the while, Dale was using her 'hands-on' work to feel for holding patterns in people's backs, hips and shoulders, gently encouraging them to release. As a new set of tools emerged for the musicians to use, bodies, sounds and spirits freed up and the music started to breathe. I believe everyone came away with renewed trust that it was possible to replace stress with enjoyment in performance.

Following on from this, Dale and I were invited to do a workshop at the Royal Northern College of Music. At the beginning of the day I often ask the group what comes to mind when they think of the in-breath and out-breath. Here are some of the things the students came up with.

Inspiration: Expression
Receiving: Giving
Holding: Letting go
Down bow; Up bow
Expansion: Contraction
Doing: Non-doing
Dominant: Tonic
High Tide; Low Tide

Listening to these young people we were reminded that breath is indeed an expression of life itself, and well worth paying attention to.

Ruth Phillips and Dale Culliford are available separately or together for individual or group sessions with musicians of all levels. Please contact us for more information or if you would like to organize a workshop in your area.

Ruth: info@thebreathingbow.com
Dale: dalecello@hotmail.co.uk

Ruth will be teaching at the Brancaleoni International Music Festival in Italy and runs Breathing Bow retreats at her home in Provence. You can find more information at the following websites:
www.brancaleonifestival.com/strings.html
www.thebreathingbow.com

Remembering Denis Vigay

Founder member and enthusiastic supporter of LCS, Denis Vigay died last year, aged 89. Born in Brixton, London in 1926, Vigay studied at the Royal Academy of Music on a scholarship with Cedric Sharpe. Upon completing his studies he was appointed principal cello of the Sadler's Wells Opera Orchestra, and in 1956 became principal cello of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He was later appointed principal cello of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, performing under the late Pierre Boulez, and following this was principal cello of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields under Sir Neville Marriner. His playing is featured on a number of Academy of St Martin albums, and on film and popular recordings, including and The Beatles' Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Vigay also taught at the Royal Academy of Music and tutored cellists at the National Youth Strings Academy.

His two Italian cellos are currently in the Ingles and Hayday March auction, one of the Ruggeri family and the other a fine sounding instrument from Turin.

Members' News & Views

• From Michela Cocolin:
An almost entirely Romantic repertoire for a Valentine's Day morning recital at Blackheath Halls with Rebeca Omordia, piano, and Jiaxin Lloyd Webber, cello, found its climax in the Rachmaninov "Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor". It was good to hear works by often neglected British composers, too, "Decorations for Piano" and "Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor" by John Ireland's were performed as well as the hauntingly beautiful "In the Half Light" for cello and piano by William Lloyd Webber.

With their multi-ethnic background and international concert experience, it will be interesting to see whether Jiaxin and Rebeca will be performing new works together in future, perhaps by African or Asian composers that remain undiscovered in the UK.

• For Sale:
1. Two wooden cello (coffin) cases: for storage, conversion to a children's bookcase or drinks cabinet! One painted black, with brass carrying handles, a beautiful red velvet lining, little storage compartment inside the neck of the case. Vintage string packets can be included. The other is rather roughly painted brown outside, a green baize lining, a small metal plaque with the words, "Lieut.Colonel S. Chamier, Royal Horse Artillery" on the side and a paper sticker on the front, with a coat of arms and a name (hard to make out); also with a curious small compartment in the neck of the case. Photos, measurement and weights can be supplied. Collection to be arranged (Canterbury area). £60 each.

2. An assortment of cello mutes - an old brass one, an old silver and horn one, and a heavy metal practice one (stamped, M-M DIST CO,ANN ARBOR, MICH 48106). Prices to be discussed.

3. Assortment of cello accessories: 3 tailpieces, an endpin, a fingerboard, bridge, and rolls of black leather and mock snakeskin. Price to be discussed - photos can be emailed.

4. Books: *History of the Violoncello, Viola da Gamba, etc., their precursors and Collateral Instruments, with Biographies of All the Most Eminent Players* by Edmund S.J. Van der Straeten, 1914 - 1971, hardback (£7, plus postage, or meet in London).
The Great Cellists by Margaret Campbell, 1988, hardback (£8, plus postage).
Joys and Sorrows by Pablo Casals, as told to Albert E. Kahn, paperback (£6, plus postage).

Contact: Marilyn Sansom 01227 752275 or marilyn.sansom@me.com

• From Hannah Burton:
My father is a furniture maker who has made a cello/music stand featured on Classic FMs Facebook. It has received over 2000 likes. He is also number 1 on Pinterest images for cello stands. It is made of solid wood with a leather band to hold the cello. www.thejollydesign.com

• From Peter Vel:
Some years ago I wrote an article on getting the best out of your cello. Things have moved on. I have a video now on youtube which updates and expands on this subject. You can view this on my website: www.vstrings.co.uk or on youtube under 'peter vel'.

• For Sale:
A Prz Mier German Cello Bow £1,250. Round pernambuco stick. Silver-mounted ivory face. Ebony frog and ring ,3 part adjuster. (Matthew Coltman Valuation £3000)
Contact: Penelope Sapiro at p.sapiro@blueyonder.co.uk or 020 8940 9317