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In Search of the Eighteenth-Century “Violoncello”: Antonio Vandini and the Concertos for Viola by Tartini

Marc Vanscheeuwijck

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Von dem Violoncello, Bassa Viola und Viola di Spala.

Wir wollen alle drey in eine Brühe werffen: Denn alles dreyes sind kleine Bass-Geigen, auf welchen man mit leichtere Arbeit als auf dem grossen Violon allerhand geschwinde Sachen, Manieren, Variationes und dergleichen machen kan.¹

In this rarely-quoted excerpt, Johann Philipp Eisel obviously paraphrases Johann Mattheson’s definition of the violoncello in *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre*.² It is yet another description that does not conform precisely to our early twenty-first century historical construct of the “baroque” cello. In the past not much attention has been given to such descriptions, considered to be too deviant from the general understanding of what a cello was supposed to be: five or six strings were not considered to represent the “normal” cello, and the *viola da spalla* was considered a different instrument altogether. However, recent research has finally taken such descriptions seriously, particularly in light of what iconographic sources are offering. In the past two decades, scholars have begun not only to entirely revise our understanding of what the *violone* might have been, but also to re-evaluate our notions about violoncello in the seventeenth

¹“About the violoncello, *bassa viola* and *viola da spalla*. We will throw all three of them in the same broth, since all three are small bass violins on which one can do all sorts of fast things, passages, and variations, etc. with much less effort than on the big violone.” Johann Philipp Eisel, *Musicus Autodidacticus* (Augsburg, 1738), 44.

²“Der hervorragende Violoncello, die Bassa Viola und Viola di Spala, sind kleine Bass-Geigen in Vergleichung der grössern mit 5 auch wol 6. Sayten worauff man mit leichterer Arbeit als auff grossen Maschinen allerhand geschwinde Sachen, Variationes und Manieren machen kan insonderheit hat die Viola di Spala, oder Schulter-Viole einen grossen Effect bey dem Accompanement, weil sie starck durchschneiden und die Töne rein exprimiren kan. Ein Bass kan nimmer distincter und deutlicher herausgebracht werden als auff diesem Instrument. Es wird mit einem Bande an der Brust befestigt und gleichsam auff die rechte Schulter geworffen, hat also nichts dass seinem Resonantz im geringsten aufhält oder verhindert.” Johann Mattheson, *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg, 1713), 285-286.

and eighteenth centuries.³ At this point we can no longer assume that the term violoncello was used everywhere in Europe exclusively to denote the four-string small bass violin (tuned C-G-d-a) played in “*da gamba*” position with overhand bow grip, as Corrette shows and is the first to describe.⁴ Based on in-depth critical re-reading of treatises and documents, on a more nuanced (re-)consideration of iconographic sources, and on a more open-minded questioning of the repertoire itself, the scholarly and performing communities have come to realize that all “violoncello” means is a small bass violin, literally a “small violone.” Whether it was held *da gamba*, *da spalla*, *da braccio*, across the player’s lap, or standing on the floor, on a stool, or hung with a rope around the neck or shoulders; whether it had four, five, or six strings; whether the bow was held overhand or underhand; whether the left-hand position was diatonic or chromatic; or whether the strings were tuned in fifths or in a combination of fourths and fifths—all these factors are to be ascertained by situational, regional and even local practices, through information gathered in the various types of sources mentioned above, and very importantly, in the repertoire as well. Even though there still is no comprehensive study on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century bowed bass instruments, large and small, scholars and performers have begun to address a number of these specific questions related to our traditionally monolithic approach to what the violoncello may have been before it became the later-eighteenth-century instrument so long considered to be the baroque cello.

³ See Stephen Bonta, “From Violone to Violoncello: A Question of Strings?” *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 3 (1977): 64-99 and “Terminology for the Bass Violin in Seventeenth-Century Italy,” *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 4 (1978): 5-43; Alfred Planavsky, *The Baroque Double Bass Violone*, trans. James Barket (Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Tharald Borgir, *The Performance of the Basso Continuo in Italian Baroque Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987); Lowell Lindgren, Preface to *Antonio Bononcini: Complete Sonatas for Violoncello and Basso Continuo*, Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era 77 (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1996): vii-xxiii, for problems concerning the violone and violoncello. A bibliography is available on <http://www.greatbassviol.com/violone> and on <http://www.greatbassviol.com/cello.html>. On the other hand the following sources deal more specifically with *viola/violoncello da spalla*: Gregory Barnett, “The Violoncello da Spalla: Shouldering the Cello in the Baroque Era,” *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 24 (1998): 81-106; Agnes Kory, “A wider role for the tenor violin?” *Galpin Society Journal* (1994): 123-153 and “The Significance of the Tenor Violin,” *The Consort* 62 (2006): 63-91; Brent Wissick, “The Cello Music of Antonio Bononcini: Violone, Violoncello da Spalla, and the Cello “Schools” of Bologna and Rome,” *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 12, no. 1 (2006): <http://sscm-jscm.press.uiuc.edu/v12/no1/wissick.html>; Lambert Smit, “Towards a More Consistent and More Historical View of Bach’s *Violoncello*,” *Chelys* 32 (2004): 49-, revised version in <http://www.xs4all.nl/~lambdsmith/flash/towardsnew.swf>; Dmitry Badiarov, “The Violoncello, Viola da Spalla and Viola Pomposa in Theory and Practice,” *Galpin Society Journal* 60: 121-145 (available on http://violadabraccio.com/pdf/GSJ60_121-145_Badiarov.pdf).

⁴ See Michel Corrette, *Methode, théorique et pratique. Pour Apprendre en peu de tems le Violoncelle dans sa Perfection* (Paris, 1741), frontispiece, and description on p. 7; and Marc Vanscheeuwijck, “The Baroque Cello and Its Performance,” *Performance Practice Review* 9/1 (1996): 78-96, esp. 91.

In this essay,⁵ I will concentrate on a particular issue which emerges from two single examples from the repertoire: what instrument Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) had in mind for his two concertos, one for “viola”—clearly not to be understood as today’s “alto” viola—the other for a tenor string instrument. I will argue that he composed both concertos for one of the great cellists of the eighteenth century, Antonio Vandini, the Bolognese friar active in Padua as Tartini’s cellist and friend. Based on this hypothesis, I will demonstrate why the two concertos are works neither for “standard” cello, nor for the *viola da gamba*. My evidence is a combination of biographical information about Tartini and Vandini, iconography, and stylistic and technical analysis of the repertoire at hand. Given Vandini’s activities as a cellist under Vivaldi at the Venetian Ospedale della Pietà before he joined the *Cappella Musicale* of the Basilica del Santo in Padua, my conclusions will have repercussions not only for the two Tartini concertos, but also on a number of violoncello concertos and sonatas by Vivaldi and their contemporaries. To date, modern editions, performances, and recordings have considered only the cello or the *viola da gamba* (and in rare cases also the viola) as possible candidates for performing the two concertos.⁶ In light of recent thinking about a greater organological and performance-practice variety, I will conclude that, like the term violone, the term violoncello is generic and denotes a small bass violin, but that its specific appearance can be a wide variety of instruments depending on time, area, and personal preference of the performer. In short, I posit that we have erred long enough in thinking that the term violoncello during the first 100 years of its usage referred to a single type of small bass violin. Some time fairly late in the eighteenth century—and I emphasize that it is impossible to pinpoint a more specific period or area—various types were gradually abandoned in favor of the instrument that is now universally recognized to be the cello.

Giuseppe Tartini’s compositional output (excluding his numerous sacred vocal compositions) consists primarily of violin concertos and sonatas for violin with or without bass. Moreover, he also left two (doubtful) concertos for flute and strings (in F and G Major) and two concertos traditionally attributed to either the cello or the bass gamba. The first concerto I discuss is in D Major; it is preserved in an autograph manuscript at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna⁷ as well as in two later copies. One is in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek

⁵ I have delivered shorter versions of this paper at the symposium organized by Paolo Da Col at the Conservatorio Statale di Musica Giuseppe Tartini in Trieste (30 May 2007) and at the symposium connected to the 12th *Premio Bonporti* in Rovereto (3 November 2007), organized by Romano Vettori, and I have discussed ideas about violoncello and violone with performers and students during seminars at the Aula de Música in Alcalá de Henares (29-30 April 2007) and at the early music department of the Royal Conservatory in Brussels (11 April 2008). I also had the opportunity to exchange ideas with Prof. Pierluigi Petrobelli and with colleagues and friends Dmitry Badiarov, Gregory Barnett, Sigiswald Kuijken, and especially Peter Van Heyghen, to all of whom I am extremely grateful.

⁶ To my knowledge there is only one recording on period instruments of each of the two concertos of Tartini: the concerto in D Major is played by cellist Roel Dieltiens with Ensemble 415’ (Harmonia Mundi France HMC 901548, in 1995) and the concerto in A Major by gamba player Vittorio Ghielmi with Il Gardellino (Eufoda 1371, in 2007).

⁷ A-Wgm, A 423, ms. IX 33952.

in Berlin, a copy by Johannes Klingenberg made in the late nineteenth century; and the second, in the Landesbibliothek in Dresden, was copied by the great cellist Friedrich Grützmacher, who published its first printed edition between 1886 and 1891 as a *Concerto per viola da gamba con Quartetto e due corni*. However, the title of the composition as specified in the manuscript is actually *Concerto p[er] Viola con Quartetto e due corni accompagn: da Giuseppe Tartini*.⁸ The other composition is a concerto in A Major (the manuscript of which is still extant in the Archivio Musicale della Basilica Antoniana in Padua⁹) written for an unspecified tenor instrument (the part is notated entirely in tenor clef), two violins, viola, and bass. Later it was also assigned to the *viola da gamba*, even though in the early twentieth century Ravanello wrote on the manuscript that the piece was a concerto for the violoncello.¹⁰

Since Tartini left us no very clear information about the particular destination of the two concertos (at least for today, his indications are insufficient), it is understandable that both cellists and gamba players have inserted these compositions into their respective repertoires. In defense of viol players performing the concertos, I should mention that at the *Simposio Internazionale sulla Viola da Gamba in Italia* organized in Magnano in 2000,¹¹ scholars and performers convincingly showed that the old cliché claiming that the *viola da gamba* was practically no longer used in Italy from the middle of the seventeenth century on requires serious re-evaluation.¹² From the organological point of view—and in addition to the viols built by

⁸ In his monograph *Giuseppe Tartini* (Milan: Garzanti, 1945), 264, footnote 10, Antonio Capri claims that the D Major concerto was probably originally written for violin solo. Capri was not yet aware of the autograph manuscript and only knew Grützmacher's Breitkopf & Härtel edition for *viola da gamba* with piano reduction.

⁹ I-Pca, Ms. D VII 1902/87. I am most grateful to Cristina Targa of the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica in Bologna (I-Bc) for giving me a photocopy of this manuscript.

¹⁰ After Grützmacher's edition, the Concerto in D was published as a concerto for cello by Salmon (Paris: Ricordi, 1921), by Hindemith (Mainz: Schott, 1929), and again for *viola da gamba* (with "violoncello" between brackets) by Fritsch (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1986). The concerto in A Major was first published as a cello concerto by van Leyden (Leipzig: Alkor, 1937), by Ravanello and Silva (Padua: Zanibon, 1938), and more recently for violoncello or *viola da gamba* by Max Cassoli (also Padua: Zanibon, 1974). See Pierluigi Petrobelli, *Giuseppe Tartini: Le Fonti Biografiche* (Venice: Universal Edition, 1968), 75, footnote 3 for further details. See also: Bettina Hoffmann, *Catalogo della musica solistica e cameristica per viola da gamba* (Lucca: LIM Antiqua, 2001), 168.

¹¹ Susan Orlando, ed., *The Italian Viola da Gamba: Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Italian Viola da Gamba*. Magnano, 29 April-1 May 2000 (Turin and Solignac, 2002).

¹² Such a claim was primarily based on André Maugars' 1639 letter from Rome, *Response faite à un Curieux sur le Sentiment de la Musique d'Italie* (ed. Joël Heuillon, Paris: Cahiers GKC, 1992), 22, lines 306-310: "*Quant à la Viole, il n'y a personne maintenant dans l'Italie qui y excelle, et même elle est fort peu exercée dans Rome: c'est de quoy je me suis fort étonné, [...]*." Even Lucy Robinson in her short paragraph (n°5) on "Italy from c.1580" still uses Maugars' quotation, though followed by: "Nevertheless the viol family did not die out [in Italy]." See *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Viol," by Ian Woodfield and Lucy Robinson.

Ciciliano or by Gasparo Bertolotti da Salò—it is well known that the Amatis, the Guarneris, Matteo Gofriller, and even Antonio Stradivari built gambas.¹³ Moreover, gambist Vittorio Ghielmi called attention to a manuscript in Bologna probably from the second quarter of the eighteenth century, entitled *Modo pratico, ò sia Regola per accompagnare il Basso Continuo per la Viola da Gamba*, basically a practical method book for the instrument.¹⁴ We also should not overlook the few Italian compositions, printed or in manuscript, for the *viola da gamba*: the *VI Sonate. Le prime quattro a violoncello solo e basso continuo, le altre due a due violoncelli ovvero due viole da gamba* by Giorgio Antonioti (Amsterdam, 1735), and the *VI Sonate a Tré, Due Violoncello o Due Viole di Gamba e Violoncello o Basso Continuo, Opera II* by Benedetto Marcello (1734). There is also the *Solo per la viola da gamba* (1730) by Carlo Zuccari(ni), extant in a manuscript of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris,¹⁵ which also contains cello sonatas by Vandini and Sammartini. There are several concertos and also arias in *l'Incoronazione di Dario* (RV 719) and in *Juditha Triumphans* (RV 644) by Antonio Vivaldi, written for the *Violoncello, viola* or *violetta* “all’inglese,” an instrument taught and played at the Ospedale della Pietà, and now widely accepted to have been a *viola da gamba*.¹⁶ Finally, a not inconsiderable number of archival references to the *viola da gamba* should be mentioned as well: for example in the payment lists of the Basilica del Santo (Saint Anthony) in Padua throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, or even in the lists of instrument collections such as the 1700 inventory of the Medici instruments.¹⁷ In short, even if the *viola da gamba* were used more rarely in Italy—and mainly to create particular and unusual sound effects—the instrument was in no way absent from the eighteenth-century Italian musical scene, as has long been thought. Indeed, as far as Tartini’s concertos are concerned, we can no longer exclude the *gamba a priori* as a possible choice for performing these compositions. Since we have no certainties about either the preferred instrument, the purpose or destination of the concertos, their date of composition, or who first performed them, we will have to make a number of conjectures based on contextual considerations.

¹³ See Carlo Chiesa, “The Viola da Gamba in Cremona,” in Orlando, *The Italian Viola da Gamba*, 92-94.

¹⁴ I-Bc, D.117.

¹⁵ F-Pn, Vm⁷ 6285. See Vittorio Ghielmi, “An Eighteenth-Century Italian Treatise and Other Clues to the History of the Viola da Gamba in Italy,” in Orlando, *The Italian Viola da Gamba*, 78. There is also Giorgio Antonioti’s *Opus I*, titled *XII Sonate, le Prime Cinque à Violoncello Solo e Basso, e le Altre Sette à due Violoncelli Overo due Viole da Gamba*. A useful recent contribution to the *gamba* situation in Italy after 1640 is: Bettina Hofmann, “‘Viola’ — Gambe, Bratsche oder Cello? Probleme der Katalogisierung barocker Gambenmusik in Italien nach 1640,” in *Viola da gamba und Viola da braccio: Symposium in Rahmen der 27. Tage Alter Musik in Herne, 2002*, eds. Christian Ahrens and Gregor Klink (Munich: Musikverlag Katzblicher, 2006), 179-291.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-84.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* See also Frederick Hammond, “Musical Instruments at the Medici Court in the Mid-Seventeenth Century,” *Analecta Musicologica* 14 (1974): 151-169.

As mentioned earlier, Tartini was a very close friend of the Bolognese cellist Don Antonio Vandini, born around 1690 and hired at the Basilica del Santo in Padua on 9 June 1721. After a short spell as a cellist at Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo, he became *maestro di violoncello* at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice from 27 September 1720 until 4 April 1721. We cannot exclude the possibility that Vandini studied with cellist Giuseppe Maria Jacchini in Bologna, but no documents can confirm this. It would have been Vandini who insisted that Tartini follow him to Prague to participate in the grand celebrations for the coronation of Emperor Charles VI of Austria as king of Bohemia in June 1723. In Prague Tartini and Vandini met and collaborated with Johann Joseph Fux, cellist Antonio Caldara, and lutenist Sylvius Leopold Weiss, among many others. Upon completion of the festivities, Tartini and Vandini decided to remain in Prague and enter the service of the family of Count Kinsky. They also established musical contacts with Prince Lobkowitz and stayed in the Bohemian capital until 1726.¹⁸

Since the autograph manuscript of Tartini's D Major concerto is preserved in Vienna, one might assume that the piece was composed while Tartini resided in the Holy Roman Empire. However, a few brief considerations about the style of the piece will necessarily situate it in a much later phase of his output, probably in the 1760s or at any rate in Tartini's third and last stylistic period (1750-1770) as described by Minos Dounias.¹⁹ Organized in three movements (the fifty-measure introductory *Largo* is directly attached to the *Allegro*), the concerto in D Major presents such late stylistic traits as the central importance of the slow movement (*Grave*) in relation to the fast movements; an almost vocal melodic predominance of the solo part which carries the entire expressive weight (see Mus. Ex. 1); the use of folk elements in the slow sections; and extended cadenzas entirely written by the composer (as highly ornamented *Capricci*). The presence of *corni da caccia*, to which I will return, is another element in favor of a later dating. On the other hand, the concerto in A Major seems to belong to an earlier moment in Tartini's output: not only are there no horns, but no cadenzas appear in the fast movements (only the *Larghetto* presents a short cadenza at the end). Furthermore the stylistic language, with its triplets in the third movement (*Allegro assai*), really belongs to the *stile galante*. Moreover,

¹⁸ See *Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti (Biografie)*, s.v. "Tartini, Giuseppe," by Pierluigi Petrobelli; Petrobelli's articles on Tartini in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*; and Petrobelli's updated on-line article on Tartini at <http://www.mininova.org/tor/1193639>. Pierluigi Petrobelli, *Tartini, le sue idee e il suo tempo* (3-20); "Giuseppe Tartini," in *Storia della Musica al Santo di Padova*, eds. Sergio Durante and Pierluigi Petrobelli (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1990), 181-221. See also Andrea Bombi and Maria Nevilla Massaro, eds., *Tartini. Il tempo e le opere* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994). The most important source for this information being the oration Francesco Fanzago read at a memorial service for Tartini on 31 March 1770, but based on an anonymous biography, which Petrobelli convincingly attributes to Vandini himself, see Pierluigi Petrobelli, *Giuseppe Tartini: Le Fonti Biografiche* (Venice: Universal Edition, 1968), 14, 26 & 72.

¹⁹ Minos Dounias, *Die Violinkonzerte Giuseppe Tartinis als Ausdruck einer Künstlerpersönlichkeit und eine Kulturepoche* (Wolfenbüttel: Kallmeyer, 1935), 215-232. All "D." numbers refer to Dounias' catalogue of Tartini's violin concertos included in his book, 243-297.

some thematic incises in the first *Allegro* are almost identical to three incises of the opening *Presto* of the Violin Concerto in D Major (D.42), and similarities in structure, style, and thematic materials with the A Major violin concerto (D.110), both datable shortly after 1750, are striking. Finally, the theme of the second movement is identical to the opening incise of the theme of the Sonata B.a1, dated c.1745.²⁰

Mus. Ex. 1: Tartini, Concerto in D Major, *Grave*.

The musical score for Tartini's Concerto in D Major, *Grave* movement, is presented in a single system. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The score begins with the tempo and performance instruction "Grave Solo". The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings. Measure numbers 7, 13, 19, 24, 29, and 31 are indicated at the start of their respective lines. A "Cad[enza]" is marked between measures 24 and 29. The score concludes with a *p* (piano) marking at measure 31, followed by a *f* (forte) marking at the end of the line.

But let us return to the late-period concerto in D Major. If we can assume that it were written for performance in the Basilica del Santo in Padua and that it were played by Vandini himself, as Pierluigi Petrobelli has convincingly argued, we know that the *corno da caccia* players Giovanni and Francesco Bacco (sons of Matteo, a trumpet player) were definitively hired

²⁰ Mentioned by Claudio Scimone in his short preface to the edition of the concerto by Max Cassoli (Padua: Zanibon, 1974). "B" refers to the catalogue of Tartini's sonatas by Paul Brainard, *Le sonate per violino di Giuseppe Tartini: catalogo tematico* (Padua and Milan, 1975), and "a1" is the key and number.

at the Santo from 1759, which would provide us with a *terminus post quem*.²¹ If composed for the Santo, the concerto could have been performed either during the various Proper moments in a concerted mass (*i.e.*, the first movement during the Offertory, the second, slow movement during the Elevation, and the final movement at the end of the mass), as Petrobelli hypothesized,²² or as was the case in Lucca with Luigi Boccherini's cello concertos in the same period played as a substitution for the hymn during a solemn Vesper service.²³

At this point, the next problem to be addressed is the question of the instrument for which the concerto was meant. As mentioned above, the title on the autograph manuscript indicates "viola." This does clearly not refer to what we understand as the (alto) viola today, since the piece is written in bass (F4) and tenor (C4) clef. Given the confirmed if diminished presence of the *viola da gamba* in Italy—and particularly in the Veneto region—at the time, one could hypothesize, as did Grützmacher, that the concerto was meant for that instrument. Unfortunately, certain arpeggios in the cadenza of the first *Allegro* make a performance on an instrument tuned in fourths and a third much more complicated (although not entirely impossible) than on a cello, tuned in fifths. In addition, Vandini is mentioned in a variety of Paduan documents as a player of the *viola* or *violoto*, possibly because he held the bow underhand as did the viol players²⁴—an oft-presented hypothesis I do not share, for reasons I will briefly touch upon below. Reflecting a comment by Christoph Gottlieb von Murr,²⁵ Charles Burney wrote on 2 August 1770 that "*It was remarkable that Antonio [Vandini], and all the other violoncello players here, hold the bow in*

²¹Maria Nevilla Massaro, "Il Settecento," in *Storia della Musica al Santo di Padova*, eds. Sergio Durante and Pierluigi Petrobelli, 114-115. In his article "Per l'edizione critica di un concerto tartiniano (D. 21)," first published in 1962 and re-issued in the 1992 collection *Tartini, le sue idee e il suo tempo*, Petrobelli already mentions (131) the presence of two *corni da caccia* for the exceptional celebration of the inauguration of the *Cappella delle Reliquie* in the Basilica del Santo on 21 July 1745. Moreover, Petrobelli claims that during the celebration the concerto that was performed was the D major violin concerto D. 28. See "Tartini e Corelli," *ibidem*, 144.

²²See also Petrobelli, *Giuseppe Tartini: Le Fonti Biografiche*, 14-15, footnote 2: during the memorial service in honor of Tartini at the Paduan church of the Padri Serviti on 31 March 1770, Tartini's former student and successor as first violinist at the Santo, Giulio Meneghini, played a violin concerto after the Offertory.

²³Remigio Coli, *Luigi Boccherini. La vita e le opere* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 2005), 26-27, 36-37, and 49.

²⁴See *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Vandini, Antonio," by Sven Hansell with Maria Nevilla Massaro, echoing Petrobelli's thesis as presented in his *Giuseppe Tartini: Le Fonti Biografiche*, 72-79.

²⁵"Der berühmte Antonio Vandini. Er halt den Bogen nach der alten Art, mit der Hand am Haare und dem Daumen am Holze, wie bey dem Gambenspiele." See: Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, "Entwurf eines Verzeichnisses der besten jetztlebenden Tonkünstler in Europa," *Journal zur Kunstgeschichte und zur allgemeinen Literatur* II (Nuremberg 1790), col. 709-710 (quoted in Petrobelli, *Giuseppe Tartini*, 78).

the old-fashioned way, with the hand under it.”²⁶ Even though the only image we have of Vandini playing is a caricature by Pier Leone Ghezzi (see Fig. 1)²⁷, it is clear that he did indeed use the underhand bow grip, in common with virtually all musicians who played the instrument *da gamba*, and as opposed to those who played either *da braccio* or *da spalla*, as did most violinist/cellists in the area between Bologna and Modena (see Fig. 3). In the European iconographic sources of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries for bass violins, large or small, with four, five, or six strings, played *da gamba*, I have not found a single image in which the player holds the bow in overhand position (see Fig. 4).

Fig. 1: Pier Leono Ghezzi: Antonio Vandini



²⁶ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London, 1773), 142, also quoted in Carol MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music in Performance* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1979), 367.

²⁷ There is also the picture of a friar-cellist playing a small instrument with underhand bow grip assumed to be Vandini by Van Der Straeten. See Edmund S. J. Van Der Straeten, *History of the Violoncello, Viol da Gamba, their Precursors and Collateral Instruments* (London: William Reeves, 1914), 162, see Fig. 2.

Fig. 2: Anon.: Antonio Vandini (?). From E. Van der Straeten



FIG. 35. VANDINI.

Fig. 3: Andrea Celesti: Pope Benedict III visits the Monastery of San Zaccaria, 1672 (Venice, Church of San Zaccaria).

http://violadabraccio.com/violin.pictures/details.php?image_id=577



Fig. 4: Jan Miense Molenaer: Musical Company, c.1630 (Haarlem, on loan to Frans Halsmuseum) http://violadabraccio.com/violin.pictures/details.php?image_id=492



A tendency towards holding the bow in the modern, overhand grip appears in the eighteenth century and is first described by Corrette in his 1741 treatise. Since Burney saw Vandini play in 1770, when the cellist was about eighty years old, he understandably associated Vandini's bow grip with an older tradition of cello playing.²⁸ Petrobelli's assumption that this

²⁸ Quantz too acknowledges that many cellists still play with underhand bow grip, but that the Italians more often used the overhand grip: "*Einige streichen mit dem Bogen so, wie es bey der Viola da Gamba üblich ist, nämlich: anstatt des herunterstrichs, von der linken zur rechten hand, bey den hauptnoten, machen sie den hinauffstrich, von der rechten zur linken, und fangen mit der Spitze des Bogens an. Andere hingegen machn es wie die Violinisten, und fangen denselben Strich mit dem untersten Theil des Bogens an. Diese letztere Art ist bey den Italiänern üblich, und thut nicht nur beym Solospielen, sondern auch vornehmlich beym Accompagnement, bessere Wirkung, als die erste: [...]*" See Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die flute traversiere zu spielen*, (Breslau: J.F. Korn, 3rd edition, 1789), 212 (Chapter XVII, Section IV, §2) [Some move the bow as is customary on the *viola da gamba*, that is, instead of a down-stroke from left to right for the principal notes, they make an up-stroke from right to left, beginning with the tip of the bow. Others, however, proceed like violinists, and begin their strokes with the lowest part of the bow. This latter method is customary among the Italians, and produces a better effect, particularly in

fact would explain the “confusing” use of the term *viola* by association with the *viola da gamba* bow grip is partly anachronistic and partly based on von Murr’s direct observation of 12 December 1760.²⁹ Bettina Hoffmann has also demonstrated that in the Veneto, just as in Rome, the terms *viola* and *violoncello* were often used indiscriminately to indicate a small bass violin, including instruments tuned either C-G-d-a or C-G-d-g.³⁰ However, I do not believe that this suffices to establish that Vandini was just a regular cellist (in the modern sense of the term) who used the underhand bow grip and was therefore sometimes referred to as a *viola* player, which would ultimately clarify the *Concerto per viola* at least as a concerto for the modern “baroque” cello. Although it seems quite plausible that the concerto was written for Vandini’s cello—that is, played with underhand bow grip in “the old-fashioned way”—there is no reason to assume that Vandini’s instrument was the same as today’s cello, with a sound-case length of c.75 cm and four strings tuned in fifths. Technically, the concerto in D Major is not difficult, since its virtuosity is primarily concentrated in the rhetorical execution of *cantabile* melodies,³¹ in a few chords and arpeggios, and in the correct and refined execution of its numerous ornaments. The extension does not exceed b’, and except for three notes (F#-E-D) in measure 126 of the middle *Grave* (see Mus. Ex. 2, following page), the lowest string of the cello is never used. In recalling the cello concertos Antonio Vivaldi wrote in the 1720s, when Vandini was teaching at the Pietà, we can observe certain similar tendencies: there is not much virtuosity in the Boccherinian sense of the term (high positions or wide leaps up and down the fingerboard), but rather a general extension that barely exceeds the middle of the upper string, with virtually no use of the lowest string (see Mus. Ex. 3, following page).

accompanying, but also in solo playing: (...)]. See Johann Joachim Quantz, trans. and ed. Edward R. Reilly, *On Playing the Flute*, 2nd edition, (Northeastern University Press, 2001), 241.

²⁹ See Petrobelli, *Giuseppe Tartini Le Fonti Biografiche*, 78-79.

³⁰ See Bettina Hoffmann, “‘Viola’—Gambe, Bratsche oder Cello?,” 193-194 and fig.2 on p. 191: the Aria con la viola of cellist/composer Domenico Gabrielli’s *Il Rodoaldo* definitely asks for a bass violin tuned C-G-d-g. See also Bettina Hoffmann, Introduction to *Domenico Gabrielli: The Complete Works for Violoncello*, Hortus Musicus #279 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2001), VIII, footnote 9.

³¹ Burney, *The Present State* (142), comments on Vandini’s ability to play in a speech-like manner: “I wanted much to hear the celebrated hautbois Matteo Bissoli, and the famous old Antonio Vandini, on the violoncello, who, the Italians say, plays and expresses *a parlare*, that is, in such a manner as to make his instrument *speak*; but neither of these performers had solo parts.

Mus. Ex. 2: Tartini, Concerto in D Major, [*Allegro*], MM. 124-8

[*Allegro*]

124 Solo

127

Mus. Ex. 3: Tartini, Concerto in D Major, [*Allegro*], MM. 137-55.

[*Allegro*]

137 [Cad.]

140

143

145

147

149 [simile]

154 Tutti

This seems to indicate a different instrument from the cello that became standardized later in the eighteenth century. In his treatise Quantz advises that cellists should own two instruments: one of a larger size with thick strings (and a stronger, heavier bow with black horse hair) for ripieno parts in large ensembles, and a smaller cello (he does not mention how much smaller) for solo parts.³² Boccherini too, in his inventory of personal belongings from 26 April 1787 refers to a Jacob Stainer cello and a *violoncello piccolo*.³³ Iconographic sources (see Fig.5 on the following page) and a variety of treatises (including Mattheson's *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre*³⁴), but unfortunately not too many surviving instruments, confirm the existence of various sizes of bass violins (or *violoni*) of the smaller type with four or five strings, tuned an octave below the violin (four-string instruments), or in C-G-d-a-e' (sometimes even C-G-d-a-d') and called violoncello (after 1665), *violoncino*, viola, or bassetto (starting in 1641).³⁵

³²Quantz, *Versuch*, 212: "Wer auf dem Violoncell nicht nur accompagniret, sondern auch Solo spielet, thut sehr wohl, wenn er zwey besondere Instrumente hat; eines zu Solo, das andere zum Rapienspielen, bey großen Musiken. Das letztere muß größer, und mit dicken Saiten bezogen seyn, als das erstere. Wollte man mit einem kleinen und Schwach bezogenen Instrumente beydes verrichten; so würde das Accompagnement in einer zahlreichen Musik gar keine Wirkung thun. Der zum Rapienspielen bestimmte Bogen, muß auch starker, und mit schwarzen haaren, als von welchen die Saiten schärfer, als von den weißen, angegriffen werden, bezogen seyn." (Chapter XVII, Section IV, §1). ["Those who not only accompany on the violoncello, but also play solos on it, would do well to have two special instruments, one for solos, the other for ripieno parts in large ensembles. The latter must be larger, and must be equipped with thicker strings than the former. If a small instrument with thin strings were employed for both types of parts, the accompaniment in a large ensemble would have no effect whatsoever. The bow intended for ripieno playing must also be stronger, and must be strung with black hairs, with which the strings may be struck more sharply than with white ones."] See Quantz, trans. and ed. Edward R. Reilly, *On Playing the Flute*, 241.

³³"Item un Violon de Estayner con su Caja en mil y quinienttos Reales-/Item un Violon Chico con su Caja en doscientos Reales-," see Jaime Tortella, *Boccherini. Un músico Italiano en la España ilustrada* (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Musicología, 2002), 265-267; see also Agnes Kory, "Boccherini and the cello," *Early Music* 33, issue 4 (November 2005): 749-751.

³⁴See footnote 2.

³⁵See Stephen Bonta, "Terminology for the Bass Violin in Seventeenth-Century Italy," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 4 (1978): 6, and 40-42; and Marc Vanscheeuwijck, "The Baroque Cello and Its Performance," *Performance Practice Review* 9, issue1 (1996): 80-86.

Fig. 5: Gerrit van Honthorst: Theft of the Amulet (detail), c.1625
http://www.ars-picturae.de/englisch/gemaeld_det_8_1.html
also: <http://www.greatbassviol.com/iconography/hont1.jpg>



For many more pictures, see: <http://violadabraccio.com/violin.pictures/index.php> and
also: <http://www.greatbassviol.com/iconography.html>

The case of Tartini's A Major concerto is somewhat less complex. In the autograph manuscript the solo part is notated entirely in tenor clef (C4), and while during the solo episodes either both violins, the basso continuo, or both, keep playing, the viola drops out in those moments. One could indeed imagine that instead of playing along with the bass line in the tutti sections, the solo instrument could have played the viola part, which never exceeds e''. The solo part has virtually the same extension (A-b') as the concerto in D Major, except for the F#-E-D on the lowest string, which do not appear in the A Major concerto. Such an extension works perfectly on a smaller instrument tuned an octave below the violin (G-d-a-e'), and it would allow the soloist to play the alto part in the tutti, making the composition playable with a minimum number of two violins, cello, and organ. The technical demands of this concerto are comparable to the D Major piece, although the cadenzas (called *Capriccio* in the manuscript) in each of the movements of the latter concerto are somewhat more challenging than the regular solo episodes. However, the manuscript of the A Major concerto does not present any cadenzas, meaning that the soloist will have to improvise following the fermata (M.96) before the last ritornello of the opening *Allegro*, and again in the equivalent location (M.191) of the final *Allegro assai*. One passage of this final movement with trills on double stops (M.57-59, see Mus. Ex. 4) makes a performance on the viol more problematic than on an instrument tuned in fifths.³⁶

Mus. Ex. 4: Tartini, Concerto in A major, *Allegro assai*, MM. 51-60



In conclusion, in the case of Tartini's D Major concerto, I propose that the "preferred" type of violoncello for an historically-informed performance should be a slightly smaller instrument than today's standard "baroque" cello, but with five strings. Given the fact that the extension does not go below D in the bass, the lowest string could be tuned as D rather than C,

³⁶ See also Bettina Hoffmann, *Catalogo*, 168: "Ma non solo la viola da gamba non viene mai nominata nel manoscritto della Biblioteca Antoniana; la scrittura musicale non offre alcun indizio per avallare la presunta destinazione violistica; al contrario, un trillo a doppia corda nell'ultimo movimento, inesequibile su uno strumento accordato per quarte, allontana definitivamente questa supposizione. [...] È dunque necessario cancellare definitivamente questa composizione dal repertorio violistico."

thus increasing the resonance of the instrument in a D Major concerto.³⁷ That sort of instrument was indeed quite common, particularly in the Venetian, Neapolitan, Bolognese, and even in British contexts, as can be seen in various concertos and/or sonatas by Antonio Vivaldi, Leonardo Leo, Nicola Fiorenza, Nicola Sabatino, Nicola Antonio Porpora,³⁸ Giacobbe Basevi (detto il Cervetto), Antonio Maria Bononcini, or Carlo Graziani.³⁹ In many German areas as well, such small-size cellos were often used: we need only recall the thirteen cantatas with solo

³⁷ In his *Compendio Musicale* (Ms. Ferrara, 1677 & 1694), Bartolomeo Bismantova provides a *Regola p[er] suonare il Violoncello da Spalla* (facsimile ed., Florence: S.P.E.S., 1983, p. [119]) in which he writes: “*Il Violoncello da Spalla alla moderna s’accorda in quinta, salvo che il Basso che in vece d’accordarlo in C sol fa ut, bisognerà accordarlo in D la sol re, e questo si fa p[er] la commodità del Suonatore, ma però si può ancora accordare in C sol fa ut.*” [The modern violoncello da spalla is tuned in fifths, except that the lowest string, instead of being tuned as C, should be tuned as D, and this is done for the ease of the player, but it could also be tuned as C]. Bismantova further gives an entirely diatonic fingering chart for the strings (D-G-d-a), using 0-1-2 on the D-string, 0-1-2-3 on the G- and d-strings and 0-1-2-3-4 on the a-string (for the pitches a-b-c’-d’-e’), which is only possible on a fairly small instrument played *da spalla*. Finally, on p.[120] he adds “*Le Regole et Arcade sono l’istesso di quelle del Violino*” and also “*Il Violoncello p[er] lo più sempre si suona all’ottava alta,*” that is, compared to the transposing *contrabasso*.

³⁸ Probably written shortly before 1732 (See Carlo Vitali, “Un concerto per violoncello attribuito a Porpora,” *Studi Musicali* 8 (1979), 291-301), Porpora’s concerto can be situated stylistically as an early representative of the new galant style. Technically it is not particularly challenging and it certainly does not display the dense ornamentation of Tartini’s concertos, but its extension is very similar to Tartini’s works: notated almost exclusively in tenor clef (C4), the solo part is mainly contained within the G-a’ ambitus, with one short extension in a fast scalar passage down to C (*Allegro*, M.32), and two brief ventures above a’ (to b’ in the same *Allegro*, M.8) and even to c’ (final *Allegro*, MM.67-70). In this case too, I would strongly advocate for a performance on a 5-string instrument tuned C-G-d-a-e’), because in that case most passagework would occur in first position on the three upper strings. In a recording of a cello concerto in G Major by Nicola Sabatino (the score of which I have unfortunately not seen), featuring baroque cellist Gaetano Nasillo with Ensemble 415’ (Zig-Zag-Territoires, ZZT 050302 of 2004) it seems that a cello tuned in G-d-a-e’ is used, though no mention is made of it in the liner notes. The extension of the piece does not require a C string, and the composition dwells primarily in the tenor and alto registers of the instruments. The resonance of the instrument is excellent even on the highest pitches. These two examples make a convincing case, I believe, for the use of the most appropriate number of strings and type of tuning, based on the requirements of the repertoire at hand.

³⁹ Antonio Maria Bononcini’s sonatas tell us the same sort of story: the extension of most compositions advocates for a 5-string instrument (or for several of them even a 4-string violoncello, tuned G-d-a-e’) as Lindgren explains (see Preface to *Antonio Bononcini: Complete Sonatas*, xv-xvi). However, I would point out that if the cellist uses a smaller-sized instrument than the modern “baroque” cello—played *da gamba* or *da braccio* (see also Wissick, “Cello Music of Antonio Bononcini”), the use of thumb position for certain double stops (b-flat-c’ or b-c#) becomes superfluous, since a slight extension of the left hand will suffice. On the other hand Carlo Graziani’s sonatas come technically closer to a Boccherinian treatment of the instrument, his works having been published roughly between 1760 and 1780 (see Mara E. Parker, Introduction to *Carlo Graziani. Sonatas for Violoncello and Basso*, Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era 49 (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1997): vii-xiv), but given the types of arpeggios and double stops, here too, I would strongly advocate for the use of a five-string instrument.

violoncello piccolo and the sixth solo *Suite per violoncello* (BWV 1012) by Johann Sebastian Bach. Whether the instrument was played *da braccio/da spalla* (i.e., as the *viola da spalla* or *violoncello da spalla*) or *da gamba* actually makes little difference, except that the violoncello piccolo part in most of Bach's cantatas was actually notated in the booklet of the first violinist, which may indicate that the player performed the piece on an instrument held *da braccio*. As for Vandini's specific situation, we know that he played the instrument in vertical position, but holding the bow with an underhand grip. If Tartini's concerto in D Major is played on a cello piccolo with five (D-G-d-a-d' [or e']) or four strings (G-D-a-d' [or e'])⁴⁰—in the latter case the soloist will necessarily play the three low notes mentioned above an octave higher—virtually the entire piece can be played in first, second, and third position, and the sound will be more resonant and penetrating, thanks on the one hand to more open strings, and on the other to a greater vibrating length of the strings. In other words, although one could certainly make a convincing case for playing the concerto on a five-string *viola* or *violoncello da spalla* (obviously in this case with overhand bow grip), the increased string length of a larger instrument played as Vandini did may be beneficial, but not fundamentally indispensable. The same observations apply to the concerto in A Major as well, but in this case the instrument can be limited to four strings only, tuned in fifths at the octave below the violin.⁴¹

While aware that my hypotheses are speculative, I am nonetheless convinced that Tartini's "*Concerto per viola*" in D Major and his concerto in A Major were conceived neither for the *viola da gamba* nor for today's standardized baroque cello, but for a type of violoncello piccolo with four or preferably five strings, especially in the D Major concerto. Since Vandini was indiscriminately referred to as a *suonatore di viola, di violoto, or di violoncello*, this smaller cello could well have been the instrument he played in solo compositions.⁴² On the other hand, he may well have used a larger bassetto or violoncello when his function was limited to accompanying. In addition to this hypothesis for a "preferred" type of violoncello to perform Tartini's concertos as Vandini probably did, we need to keep in mind that several other cellists played the instrument *da spalla* in various Northern Italian areas, and that this is most certainly a valuable alternative for these specific pieces. Thus modern players are actually given a number of viable options, but none of them really includes what is currently used as a semi-standardized "baroque" cello. Finally, having experimented myself on several occasions with "alternative" tuning possibilities and smaller instruments, based on indications in treatises and in the

⁴⁰ Given some of the passagework, e.g. in M.137ff. (see Mus. Ex. 3 again) a tuning of the top string as d' (instead of e') may be desirable.

⁴¹ Further information about extensions of Italian cello sonatas in particular can be found in Ute Zingler, "Studien zur Entwicklung der Italienischen Violoncellosonate von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts" (Inaugural-Dissertation, J. W. Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main, 1967), 230-233.

⁴² I do not believe however, that this smaller instrument can be the "tenor" cello Agnes Kory advocates for. I concur with Segerman on this issue that the instrument tuned an octave below the violin was called a *basso*, whereas the *tenore viola* was rather a large-size viola tuned c-g-d'-a'.

repertoire, I have come to believe that—just as with the variety of types of small bass violins called violoncello—performers, particularly of the eighteenth century (when the repertoire evolved in terms of technical challenges) were not as reluctant as we are today⁴³ to retune their instrument in a way that optimized the resonance and especially the ease with which a particular composition could be performed.

In sum, in order to explore the eighteenth-century repertoire for “violoncello” in a more historically informed way, today’s baroque cellists will need to increase their flexibility not only in dealing with the various numbers of strings (four, five, or even six), bow grips (over- and underhand) and tuning options (fifths and mixed fourths and fifths), but also with learning to play the violoncello in *da spalla* position.⁴⁴ The question of when the violoncello and its technique actually became something akin to the standardized instrument used in historical performance practice today should be the object of another essay. However, I believe that it is only with an increasing number of primarily French cellists/composers/pedagogues of the generation of the brothers Jean-Pierre Duport *l’aîné* (1741-1818) and Jean-Louis Duport *le jeune* (1749-1819)⁴⁵ and their contemporaries and followers⁴⁶—in short, cellists active from the 1760s on, who determined what the new Conservatoire would eventually adopt as the (quintessential?) violoncello—who advocated through their performances, methods, and tutor books for a violoncello with four strings, tuned in fifths (C-G-d-a), played exclusively *da gamba*, with overhand bow grip and chromatic left-hand technique, and with the consistent adoption of thumb position for alto and treble registers, that the violoncello was reduced to the one type we use today.

⁴³ Let us not forget that all tunings that differ from the “normal” C-G-d-a tuning are referred to as *scordatura* or *discordato*, literally meaning “out of tune,” a description that began to be used as soon as a standard tuning was perceived as such, later in the century. See Ephraim Segerman, “The Name ‘Tenor Violin’,” *Galpin Society Journal* 48 (1995): 181-187.

⁴⁴ Although Elizabeth Cowling, *The Cello* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975), 60-61 already suggested some aspects of this, it is only recently that such cellists as Bruno Cocset, Roel Dieltiens, Christophe Coin, Gaetano Nasillo, and violinists/*viola da spalla* players Sigiswald Kuijken, Dmitry Badiarov, Lambert Smit and others (the list is certainly incomplete) have started to turn theory into practice at last.

⁴⁵ Naturally, their approach to the violoncello and its technique has its most famous predecessors in the methods of Michel Corrette (1741) and François Cupis *le jeune* (1772).

⁴⁶ Such as Pierre-Hyacinthe Azaïs (1741-c. 1795), Joseph Bonaventure Tillière (c. 1750-c. 1790), Jean-Baptiste-Aimé-Joseph Janson (c. 1742-1803), Jean-Baptiste-Sébastien Bréval (1753-1823), Pierre-François-Olivier Aubert (1763-c. 1830), Jean-Henri Levasseur (1764-c. 1826), Jean-Marie-Raoul (1766-1837). See also Margaret Campbell, “Masters of the Baroque and Classical eras,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Cello*, ed. Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52-60; Valerie Walden, “Technique, Style and Performing Practice to c. 1900,” in *Ibidem*, 178-194; Valerie Walden, *One Hundred Years of Violoncello; a History of Technique and Performance Practice, 1740-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Sylvette Milliot, “Le violoncelle en France au XVIIIème siècle,” (Ph.D. diss., Université de Paris IV, 1975).