

A MYSTERIOUS FORGOTTEN INSTRUMENT: THE *VIOLONCELLO DA SPALLA*, A CELLO FOR VIOLINISTS

ELŐD GÁBOR¹ 

SUMMARY. As the title suggests, this article focuses on the *violoncello da spalla*, an instrument that fell into obscurity over the course of centuries and, since its re-emergence in the late 1990s, has been surrounded by considerable mystery. I first encountered references to this instrument in the late 2000s, through a Russian-born baroque violinist and instrument maker residing in the Netherlands. Already at that time, the instrument captured my attention due to its distinctive aesthetic qualities and unique sound. One might consider it remarkable: essentially a cello executed with violin technique—truly ingenious. In the present article, I aim to collect and synthesize the available information on this instrument. Drawing upon historical sources and illustrations, I will examine the various dimensions of period *violoncelli da spalla*, discuss aspects of its proper playing posture and stringing, and survey the repertoire composed specifically for it.

Keywords: violoncello da spalla, viola pomposa, baroque, violone, violoncino

Introduction

As I have already mentioned, I have been aware of the instrument's existence for more than fifteen years, but it was not until 2020 that I developed a more serious, personal engagement with it. In fact, the idea took shape during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns: with concerts canceled and venues closed, I decided to seek out a luthier to craft a *violoncello da spalla* for me. And indeed, if not now, when else would I learn to play a new instrument? Fortunately, I found a luthier from Transylvania who was very willing to undertake the construction of the instrument. Once I was able to hold my own *violoncello da spalla* in my hands, a thorough investigation began, involving research through various historical sources.

A considerable number of musicologists and performers—particularly those specializing in historically informed practices—have sought to reconstruct the historical reality of this instrument, questioning whether it truly existed, whether it played a role in everyday musical life, and whether composers

¹ Faculty of Music, Transylvania University, Braşov, Romania. E-mail: elod.gabor@unitbv.ro



produced extant works specifically intended for it. Given the extremely limited number of surviving references in Western musical culture, the prevailing assumption is that it did not exist as a distinct instrument. It is important to emphasize, however, that this concerns a musical period—the Baroque era—in which virtually no aspect of musical practice was standardized. This lack of uniformity applied not only to instruments and tuning systems but also to performance practices, which often differed significantly even within the same country. The aim of this article is to provide a clear and comprehensive account of the instrument. In order to challenge the assumption of its non-existence, reference will be made to official period documents as well as to period paintings.

Historical sources

Since the instrument is most frequently referred to by its Italian name, it is logical that the first stage of the research should begin in Italy. First, it is essential to clarify the similarities and differences between the violoncello, the violoncino, and the violone. The year is 1678, when Giovanni Maria Bononcini²'s Op. 12, a collection of four sonatas, was published, featuring the following instrumentation: violino primo, violino secondo, and violone. What makes this particularly interesting is that the instrument playing the bass line is a violone, whereas in the separate part it is indicated as a violoncello. In 1656, Cavalli³ used the term *violoncino* in his *Musiche Sacre*⁴. To further complicate matters, Andrea Grossi⁵ refers to a *violone* on the title page and a *violoncello* in the separate part, whereas in another contemporary edition, the instruments are listed as *due violini e violone*, with the bass part indicated as *Bassetto*. Based on several pieces of evidence available from the scores, it can be inferred that the *violoncino* and the *violoncello* refer to the same instrument, whereas the *violone* likely denotes a larger-sized instrument. However, the question remains as to which instrument the historical Italian composers were actually referring? A close examination of the works by the aforementioned composers, particularly those compositions in which both instruments appear within the same ensemble, reveals that the *violoncello* is afforded considerably more material to perform than the *violone*. This indicates that the *violoncello* or *violoncino* was not used solely to reinforce the basso continuo, but was often assigned an independent part⁶. In contrast, the *violone* was employed

² Giovanni Maria Bononcini (1642-1678) - Italian composer and violonist.

³ Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676) – Italian, venetian composer and singer.

⁴ *Musiche sacre concertate* is a collection of sacred music composed by the Italian Baroque composer Francesco Cavalli, published in 1656. The collection comprises various sacred works, including Masses, hymns, and psalms.

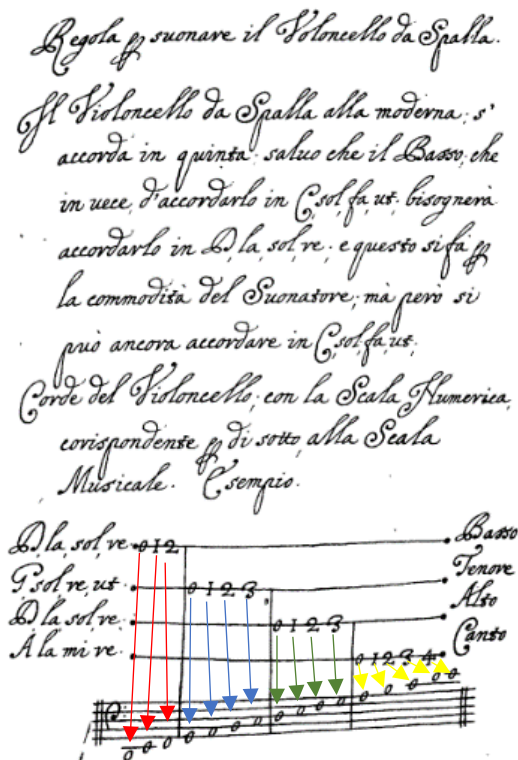
⁵ Andrea Grossi (1660-1696?) – Italian violonist and composer.

⁶ In 17th-century music, four- and five-part chamber compositions were frequently employed, essentially functioning as instrumental counterparts of the madrigals.

exclusively to double the continuo line, alongside instruments such as the harpsichord, organ, or lute.

Having now clarified the various nomenclatures, it is appropriate to return to the *cello da spalla*. Perhaps the first—and only—significant historical source from this period (1650–1700) is associated with Bartolomeo Bismantova⁷, about whom very little is known. Fortunately, his surviving *Compendio Musicale* (1699) has proven to be a highly valuable resource. Bismantova provides the following description of the *cello da spalla*:

Figure 1⁸



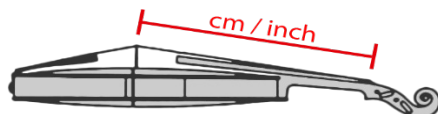
Fingerings recommended by Bismantova

⁷ Bartolomeo Bismantova (1675-1694) – Italian composer, writer and cornetist.

⁸ Bismantova, Bartolomeo. "Compendio Musicale, Libro Primo, 1699. ("The modern violoncello da spalla is tuned in fifths, with the exception of the lowest string, which, instead of the usual G–F–C tuning, is adjusted to A–G–D. This modification is made for the performer's convenience, although tuning in G–F–C is also possible. The cello strings, with their numerical range, correspond here below the musical scale".)

It can be observed that Bismantova presents an instrument for which violin fingering can effectively be applied. However, what determines the spacing between notes on a string instrument? It is quite simple: the actual spacing between notes on an instrument is determined by the vibrating string length. The term is used to refer to the distance between the bridge and the upper nut. To ensure clarity, an accompanying illustration is provided, thereby minimizing the risk of misinterpretation.

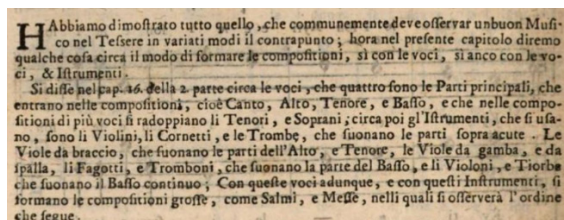
Figure 2



The vibrating string length

It should be noted that the vibrating string length of a typical violin ranges between 32.5 and 32.8 cm, that of a viola between 37 and 38 cm, and that of a modern cello between 68.5 and 70 cm. The vibrating string length of a *violoncello da spalla*, depending on the surviving historical models, varies between 42 and 45 cm. These characteristics of the instrument will be examined in more detail in a subsequent section of this study⁹.

Another highly important historical source is associated with Zaccharia Tevo¹⁰, who in his treatise *Il Musico Testore*¹¹ (1706) draws clear distinctions between violins, viola da braccios, viola da gambas, and the *cello da spalla*.

Figure 3¹²

Excerpt from Zaccharia Tevo's treatise

⁹ Bonta, Stephen, "From Violone to Violoncello: A Question of Strings?", *Jamies III*, 1977, pp. 46-68.

¹⁰ Zaccharia Tevo (1651-1709) – Franciscan, composer and organist.

¹¹ *Il Musico Testore*: It addresses topics of performance practice and theory, and upon its publication it enjoyed great popularity, to the extent that it was also issued in both German and English translations.

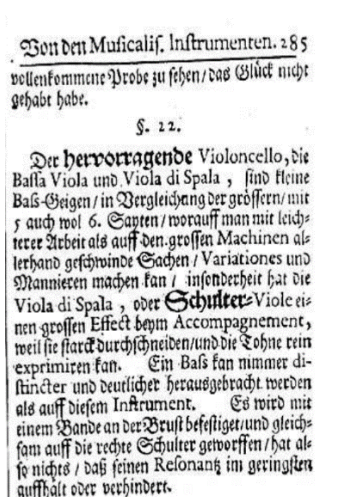
¹² Tevo, Zaccharia, "Il Musico Testore", 1706, pp. 308-309. ("The instrumental ensemble typically includes violins, cornettos, and trumpets for the upper parts; violas da braccio covering the alto and tenor registers; violas da gamba and da spalla, bassoons, and trombones providing the bass lines; and violones together with theorbos realizing the continuo. With such forces, large-scale compositions such as psalms and masses were performed.")

At this point, we pause briefly and leave Italy behind. The next significant geographical focus is Germany, where a considerably larger number of contemporary documents have survived, authored by composers and scholars who provided detailed descriptions of the physical characteristics of the instruments. To mention just a few names, titles, and dates: Johann Mattheson, *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg, 1713); Johann Philipp Eisel, *Musicus Autodidacticus* (Augsburg, 1738); Joseph Friedrich Bernhard, *Museum Musicum* (1732); and, of course, in addition to these, Leopold Mozart—father of Wolfgang Amadeus—also writes about the instrument in his *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (1756), his well-known violin treatise. Among the aforementioned authors, I would single out two in particular: Johann Mattheson¹³ and Leopold Mozart¹⁴.

We know of Mattheson that, in addition to being a widely respected diplomat, he left behind a substantial body of written documents. Among these is his *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre*, a work in which he discusses in detail performance styles, harmonic practices, as well as musical instruments.

Mattheson describes the instrument in the following way:

Figure 4¹⁵



Excerpt from Johann Mattheson's treatise

¹³ Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) – German composer, lexicographer and music theorist.

¹⁴ Leopold Mozart (1719-1787) – Austrian composer, violinist, music theorist.

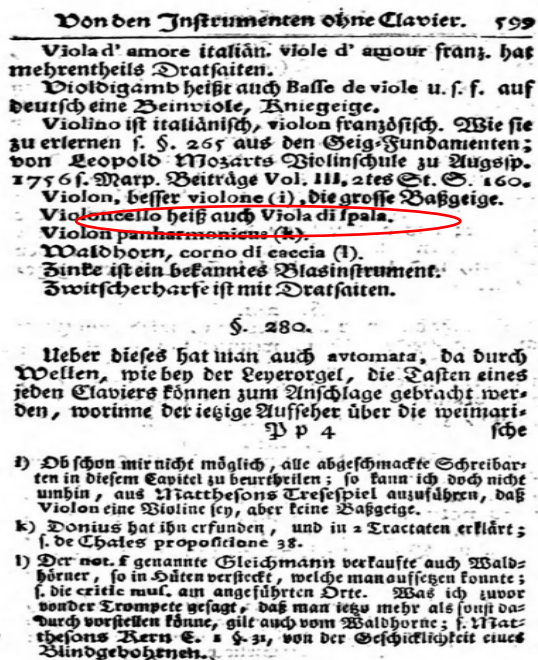
¹⁵ Mattheson, Johann, "Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre", Hamburg, 1713, p.285 ("The excellent violoncello, the bassa viola, and the Viola di Spalla [sic] are relatively small bass violins compared to the larger five- or six-string instruments. On these smaller instruments, one can execute rapid passages, variations, and ornaments with greater ease than on their larger counterparts. Moreover, the Viola di Spalla, or shoulder viola, produces a remarkable effect in accompaniment, as its sound projects clearly and distinctly. No bass line can be articulated more precisely than on this instrument. It is secured to the chest with a strap, resting on the right shoulder, allowing it to resonate freely without any obstruction.")

In his discussion of the instrument, Mattheson not only mentions it by name (Violoncello, Bassa Viola, Viola di Spala), but also characterizes it as an 'excellent Violoncello', that is, a smaller bass violin with five or six strings, capable of executing rapid, embellished, and varied melodies with less effort than on the larger instruments. The author even addresses the manner in which the instrument is held, noting that it is essentially positioned on the performer's chest, fastened with a strap, thereby allowing the hands to move freely. Moreover, this position ensures that the instrument's resonating capacity is not diminished.

It appears that the more sources we examine, the more confused our understanding of the subject becomes. Based on the above-mentioned source (Mattheson), it can indeed be stated that the three 'excellent' instruments differ fundamentally from one another, and in fact bear no real relation to the cello da spalla.

In his treatise *Anleitung zu der musikalischen Gelahrtheit*¹⁶, 1758, Jakob Adlung¹⁷ introduces and enumerates the instruments as follows:

Figure 5



“Violoncello heiss auch Viola di Spala”
– Violoncello is called Viola di Spala

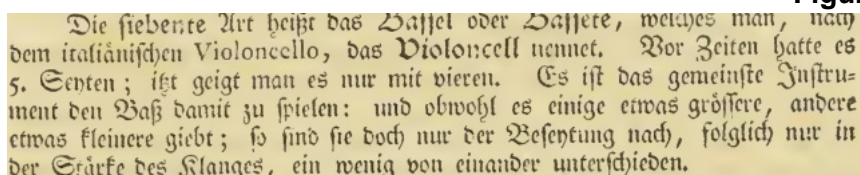
¹⁶ *Anleitung zu der musikalischen Gelahrtheit* is a treatise on musical scholarship and practice, addressing both theoretical and practical aspects of music.

¹⁷ Jakob Adlung (1699-1762) – German organist and music theorist.

As a final source, I turn to Leopold Mozart's famous violin school, in which the master offers a thorough examination of the origin of string instruments, their geographical affiliations, and their development. It is worth noting here that Leopold Mozart's violin school was published in 1756, the very year in which his second child, Wolfgang Amadeus, was born. At the time of the publication, Leopold was thirty-seven years old. Such an age may well be considered sufficient for the accumulation of a substantial body of knowledge and experience, which he later committed to writing in his treatise—material that we may thus regard, with due seriousness, as both reliable and worthy of transmission.

Concerning the violoncello, he writes as follows:

Figure 6¹⁸

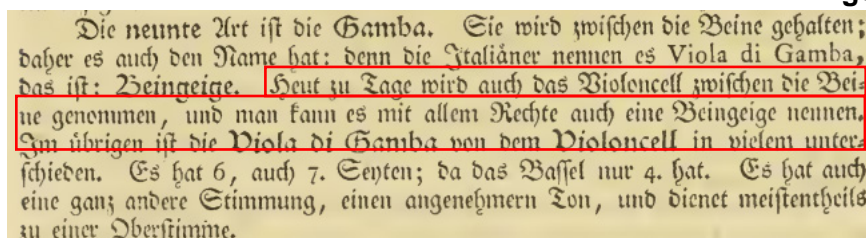


Die siebente Art heisset das Bassel oder Bassete, welches man, nach dem italiänischen Violoncello, das Violoncell nennet. Vor Zeiten hatte es 5. Seyten; ist geigt man es nur mit vieren. Es ist das gemeinste Instrument den Bass damit zu spielen: und obwohl es einige etwas grössere, andere etwas kleinere giebt; so sind sie doch nur der Befestung nach, folglich nur in der Stärke des Klanges, ein wenig von einander unterschieden.

Excerpt from Leopold Mozart's violin school

Here the author states that the seventh type of violin is called the violoncello, which formerly had five strings but is now played with only four. He in fact regards this instrument as the most suitable for performing the bass part. What struck me as even more interesting is the author's remark in connection with the viola da gamba. After explaining that the Italians call it a 'leg violin' because it is held between the legs, he immediately makes a brief reference to the violoncello, thereby extending his reflection on the instrument: 'Nowadays the violoncello, too, is placed between the legs, so it could likewise be called a leg violin.'

Figure 7



Die neunte Art ist die Gamba. Sie wird zwischen die Beine gehalten; daher es auch den Name hat; denn die Italiäner nennen es Viola di Gamba, das ist: Beinigeige. Heut zu Tage wird auch das Violoncell zwischen die Beine genommen, und man kann es mit allem Rechte auch eine Beinigeige nennen. Im übrigen ist die Viola di Gamba von dem Violoncell in vielem unterschieden. Es hat 6, auch 7. Seyten; da das Bassel nur 4. hat. Es hat auch eine ganz andere Stimmung, einen angenehmen Ton, und dienet meistens zu einer Oberstimme.

Excerpt from Leopold Mozart's violin school

¹⁸ Mozart, Leopold, "Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule", 1756, Salzburg, pp. 22-23. (The seventh type is called the cello, following the Italian violoncello. It formerly had five strings, but today only four are used. This instrument most frequently performs the bass line, and although some cellos are slightly smaller or larger than others, their differences lie primarily in stringing, and consequently, only in the power of their sound.)

The strings

It may come as no surprise that stringing the violoncello da spalla is a rather delicate and often nerve-wracking procedure. Naturally, among the strings available today, each set is custom-made and not necessarily inexpensive. I myself encountered numerous difficulties the moment it came time to string the instrument. While I already had the violoncello da spalla, I did not yet possess the strings. I began searching through various early music forums to explore what options were even available. As a violinist, I had already become accustomed to how different strings respond, which ones my instrument tends to ‘prefer,’ and, of course, the significant role that bowing and right-hand technique play in determining the choice of the ‘ideal’ strings. The first stage of my search led me to an Italian gut string manufacturer who had already been engaged in producing spalla strings for more than a decade. I purchased my first set from them, and while the two upper uncovered gut strings, a’ and e’, resonated beautifully, the lower three—d’, g’, and c’—hardly interacted with my instrument at all. Needless to say, this prompted yet another phase of research, involving precise measurements of the instrument, neck length, vibrating string length, and so forth.

From this particular line of research, I would now like to present a few especially interesting findings, for which historical sources remain, of course, indispensable. It is an interesting fact that although I have been playing the violin on gut strings for approximately fifteen years, until recently I knew relatively little about their actual nature. This research has also helped me in this regard, broadening my perspective to some extent. Since my difficulties concerned the lower three strings, I focused exclusively on these, attempting to understand why the instrument did not respond. It was for this reason that I began to investigate wound strings, particularly those wrapped with silver.

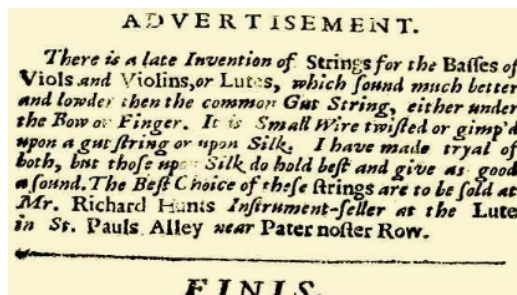
The earliest reference to a silver-wound string dates back to 1659, when Samuel Hartlib¹⁹ mentioned it in the journal *Ephemerides*²⁰. In this account, Hartlib describes how a certain Mr. Goretsky²¹ made a remarkable advancement in the strings of the bass and the lower registers of plucked instruments. He wound these strings with a thread of silver, which thereby produced a “most admirable musick”.

¹⁹ Samuel Hartlib (1600-1662) – was a british writer.

²⁰ The term *Ephemerides 1659* refers to a series of astrological and astronomical almanacs published in that year. Among the most notable are Andrea Argoli’s *Ephemerides* and Joseph Blagrove’s *Ephemeris*, both of which supplied daily planetary positions as well as astrological prognostications for the year 1659.

²¹ Unfortunately, no written documentation has survived concerning it.

Figure 8



An advertisement from a historical English newspaper

As for the identity of the aforementioned Goretzky, I do not know; no writings appear to refer to or mention his name apart from the account of Samuel Hartlib cited above. What can be stated with certainty, however, is that scholars generally regard Bologna as the principal place of origin for silver-wound strings²².

By the mid-eighteenth century, a particular type of string ideally suited for the production of lower registers had become widespread—namely the so-called *demi* string. In this design, a slight gap was left between the windings (specifically, a space equal to the diameter of the string itself). It was most likely the result of careful mathematical calculation and numerous experiments. Interestingly, both written records and surviving physical evidence of this practice are associated with none other than the famous Cremonese violin maker Antonio Stradivari²³.

Figure 9



An excerpt from a letter addressed by Stradivari,
accompanied by three string samples.

²² Badiarov, Dmitry. *Book on the Spalla*, 10-10-10 Publishing, Markham, Ontario, pp.54-55.

²³ Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737) - Perhaps one of the greatest and most highly esteemed instrument makers of all time.

“Questi sono le mostre delle tre corde grosse que la che sono di Budella va filaza á viddalba – These are the samples of the three large strings, the core is made of gut and should be covered with a spiral like the Vidalba plant.”

A closer examination of the three string samples reveals that the winding on the middle string is spaced with small gaps. As for the botanical reference, Stradivari could hardly have been more persuasive or expressive in his choice.

Figure 10,11



On the left, there is a Vidalba plant, and next to it, the strings.

On the basis of the examples discussed above, I began searching for a string maker who might be willing—or perhaps had already attempted—to produce such strings or something similar. Fortunately, I was able to find one: a maker of predominantly Renaissance and Baroque instruments based in France, who also manufactures strings and has, for quite some time, been producing the aforementioned *demi* type. And, lo and behold, my spalla responded immediately; indeed, it was the lower register that resonated most beautifully. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for his dedicated and persistent work.

The repertoire

When I began to inquire about the da spalla, I recall mentioning this ‘new-old’ instrument to a few fellow musicians, and I doubt I will ever be able to erase from my memory the expressions on their faces. They asked how it could be that, after twenty or thirty years, they had never heard of this instrument, and moreover, had never encountered a work composed specifically for the violoncello da spalla—incidentally, neither had I.

I believe that the repertoire for the da spalla can be considered twofold: One must decide what one wishes to perform on the instrument—that is, whether to focus exclusively on certain works (some of which I will enumerate) or to extend the repertoire into subsequent musical periods. I

have encountered numerous early music performers who firmly believe that anything not documented in an authentic source never existed; in other words, this is a mistaken approach. I am not suggesting that musicians who adopt this position are entirely wrong; rather, they simply choose to follow a 'conveniently' defined path—and that, too, is perfectly acceptable. When it comes to historically informed performance, I maintain that individuality, curiosity, and inspiration should take precedence in one's playing, rather than strict adherence to rules. To be clear, I am not suggesting that the advice and principles of past performers, composers, or theorists should be disregarded; rather, my point is simply that it is certain that not everyone in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries played in exactly the same manner—this remark is intended purely in a musical sense. If one considers a highly 'faithful' approach to performance practice, for example, Antonio Caldara's violin-cello sonatas could confidently be played on the *da spalla*, since Caldara is documented as having performed too on the *violoncello da spalla* in the orchestra of San Marco Basilica.²⁴ On the other hand, one could not similarly perform the cello sonatas of Caldara's contemporary, Antonio Vivaldi, on the *da spalla*, as there is no tangible evidence linking Vivaldi to the instrument in the same way as in Caldara's case.

On the other hand, as I have already mentioned, one may also perform works written specifically for this instrument²⁵:

- Johann Sebastian Bach: Six suites for violoncello solo BWV 1007-1012
- Cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach:
 - BWV 6, Bleib bei uns, denn es will Abend werden
 - BWV 41, Jusu, nun sei gepreiset
 - BWV 49 Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen
 - BWV 68 Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt
 - BWV 85 Ich bin ein guter Hirt
 - BWV 115 Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit
 - BWV 175 Er ruft seinen Schafen mit Namen
 - BWV 180 Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele
 - BWV 183 Sie werden euch in den Bann tun

The aforementioned works were composed by Johann Sebastian Bach between 1724 and 1726, and in these cantatas, he specifically designated that the cello part be performed on a *violoncello piccolo*.

²⁴ Badiarov, Dmitry. *Book on the Spalla*, 10-10-10 Publishing, Markham, Ontario, p. 64

²⁵ Badiarov, Dmitry. *Book on the Spalla*, 10-10-10 Publishing, Markham, Ontario, pp. 64-65

- Georg Philipp Telemann: Sonata for flute and viola pomposa TWV 40:111
- Antonio Caldara: Cello sonatas op.1, op.2
- José Herrando: 6 Sonatas for the viola pomposa and basso continuo
- Christian Joseph Lidarti: Sonata for Pomposa, op.37

It should be noted that Sergey Malov, a Russian violinist, violist, and not least a performer on the *violoncello da spalla*, has played Beethoven's cello sonatas, Boccherini's cello concerto, Joseph Haydn's two cello concertos, and, moreover, even Friedrich Gulda's cello concerto on the *violoncello da spalla*. In other words, today, just as in the Baroque period, composers and performers did not limit themselves to a single instrument; they were multitasking musicians. I believe that this attitude is the most suitable for ensuring that we can continually experience a wealth of new musical impressions.

The correct posture of the instrument

Based on my experience as a violinist and violist, I believe that an instrumentalist must pay close attention to maintaining a correct and comfortable playing posture. It should be noted, however, that what feels comfortable is not necessarily correct. Since no detailed records have survived regarding the proper way of holding the instrument, every musician playing the *da spalla* has had to develop an appropriate posture in a self-taught manner. Neither contemporary drawings nor paintings (a few of which will be presented at the end of this chapter) provide clear evidence of how the instrument was actually suspended on the chest. When I first received the instrument, I must admit that I also found it difficult to adapt to its posture. It appeared to be much harder to hold than what I had inferred from the images or videos I had previously examined. I therefore began experimenting to find what might not have been the ideal, but at least the most suitable posture for my own body. At this point, however, I made a crucial mistake: I disregarded the thickness and length of the strap with which the instrument is essentially fastened to the player. In retrospect, this may seem obvious, yet at the time I did not consider such details. In my view, the essential point is that the instrument should rest as stably as possible on the performer's chest, positioned beneath the chin, and be sufficiently secure to allow the right hand to execute vertical bowing movements with stability, while also enabling the left hand to move freely along the fingerboard. As I have already mentioned, for those with a background in playing the violin or viola, it is well known that even a minor change in posture can significantly affect the quality of sound production. The same applies to the *violoncello da spalla*. Regular

practice in front of a mirror has yielded certain positive results. I would argue that the instrument mentioned earlier is perhaps the most ergonomically friendly member of the violin family, at least in terms of posture. The posture required for the *cello da spalla* is, in fact, the most natural compared to the violin or viola.²⁶ All that is necessary is to adjust the strap that supports the instrument; once this is done, everything else falls into place. Unlike the previously mentioned instruments, there is no need to adopt awkward or contorted positions to produce sound.

Equally important, in my view, is careful attention to the position of the left hand. From experience, violinists and violists often tend to raise the left hand excessively. This motion is already potentially problematic on the violin, and it is equally so on the *cello da spalla*. If this movement occurs, proper bowing becomes essentially impossible. Consider that if the instrument were held nearly horizontal across the chest, the bow (as learned on the violin) would need to be perfectly parallel to the fingerboard. Needless to say, this is impossible, as no one has arms long enough to execute such a maneuver. I am almost certain that the description above—although I have tried to be fairly detailed—will gain its full meaning once it is actually presented.

Figure 12



A self-portrait of the author, demonstrating the correct posture for holding the instrument.

As I promised earlier, in the interest of providing realistic evidence and credibility, I will present a series of 17th- and 18th-century drawings and paintings.

²⁶ Barnett, Gregory. *The Violoncello da spalla: Shouldering the Cello in the Baroque Era*, JAMIS XXIV, 1998, pp. 32-35.

Figure 13



**Sanctuary of Madonna delle Grazie in Cremona,
Gian Giacomo Barbelli, c.1641**

Figure 14



Giuseppe Torelli op.4, detail from the violoncello partbook

Figure 15



Street musicians, likely performing for some festive occasion.

Conclusions

In my article, I have attempted to shed light on a forgotten instrument, which appears to be experiencing a modest revival in the 21st century, gradually gaining recognition, albeit quietly. I have considered it important—and continue to do so—to promote the music, instruments, and culture of earlier periods, because I believe that everything is interconnected. One cannot fully understand, if I may use the term, the music of Mozart, Haydn, or Beethoven without first exploring the works of the earlier eras, particularly the astonishingly ingenious compositions of the great masters of the early and late Baroque. Similarly, this implies that without knowledge of Beethoven's compositional techniques, our understanding of, for example, a Bartók string quartet would likely be diminished, and the list could be extended at length. I firmly maintain that when performing a Baroque or Classical work—regardless of the instrument used—it is essential to be fully aware of the spirit of the period and the culture of the relevant geographic region. During that time, musical notation was not as fully developed as it would be in the Romantic era, let alone the 20th century. It is therefore crucial to be familiar with certain fundamental performance practices, in order that the work can be recreated as faithfully as possible within its original context, regardless of place or period. I hope that my article, if not to the same extent as my performances, can contribute to increasing awareness in Romania of the diverse styles of earlier periods, the evolution of different characters, the richness and freedom of counterpoint, and, of course, the myriad expressions of passion. I recall that when I presented the *violoncello da spalla* in 2023 as part of the “*Sei Solo*” project, at various locations across the country, a devoted group of music enthusiasts would always gather after the concerts to examine the small cello with curiosity, remarking that “they had never even seen one in a picture”. It was a great joy for me to observe how engaged and receptive a significant portion of the Romanian audience was. Perhaps those who are already aware of the existence of the *cello da spalla*—violinists, violists, and cellists—approach J.S. Bach's solo works with a slightly different perspective.

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