

10 The sonata

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Introduction

The violin sonata took two avenues of development in the Baroque era. The seventeenth-century form, for violin and continuo, involved the violin as principal melodist. Harmonic support in the form of semi-improvised chords or the realisation of a prescribed figured bass was provided by a keyboard instrument (normally an organ or harpsichord), which could be joined or replaced by a plucked instrument (chitarrone or archlute); in addition, the bass line could be sustained, normally by a string instrument such as a cello or gamba. The sonata emerged first in Northern Italy, spreading to Austria and Germany, and later to England and France. The principal centres of sonata activity were Venice, Bologna, Vienna, Dresden, Hamburg, London and Paris, the very centres where patronage and publication were most easily attained. As the genre evolved during the seventeenth century, two different types emerged: the *sonata da camera* ('chamber sonata'), which is essentially a suite of stylised dances; and the *sonata da chiesa* ('church sonata'), the movements of which have no dance allegiances.¹

The sonata's second avenue of development, the so-called 'accompanied sonata', involved the violinist in a subordinate role to an obbligato keyboard. This type, which challenged the dominance of the sonata with continuo and eventually superseded it, began and ended in the Classical period, giving way to the true duo sonata for two equal protagonists.

The Baroque

Italy

The earliest known sonatas for violin and bass (unfigured) appeared in Cima's *Concerti ecclesiastici* (Milan, 1610), a collection mostly of sacred

works which includes six small-scale sonatas.² More important were Marini's adventurous essays in the genre³ and works by Giovanni Gabrieli⁴ and Monteverdi⁵ which heralded the emergence of a true violin idiom. Castello published the first ever volume devoted exclusively to sonatas.⁶ He added a second book (1629), his twenty-nine technically challenging essays alternating fast and slow sections, canzona-style, within one continuous movement. Fontana left six sonatas for violin (and bc) in a set of eighteen sonatas⁷ of similar sectional design, some incorporating recitative-like transitional passages and complex rhythmic patterns derived from vocal declamation. More experimental were the sonatas of Uccellini⁸ and Farina.⁹ Particularly remarkable are Uccellini's *Tromba sordina per sonare con violino solo* Op. 5, which involves *scordatura*, and Farina's four-part *Capriccio stravagante* (1627), which incorporates such effects as *col legno*, *sul ponticello*, *pizzicato* and *tremolo* in its attempt to imitate the noises of various animals and musical instruments.

Among those who developed the violin's expressive qualities during the second half of the seventeenth century were Legrenzi,¹⁰ Cazzati and G. B. Vitali. Cazzati was the first Bolognese composer to publish solo violin sonatas. His Op. 55 collection (1670) of *Sonate a 2 istromenti*, following closely after his *Varii, e diversi capricci* Op. 50 (1669) for various combinations, proved extremely influential and assisted in extending further the idiomatic language of the violin. Vitali, his most celebrated pupil, composed numerous trio and ensemble sonatas (Opp. 2, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 14), but only two sonatas for violin and continuo,¹¹ while Vitali's son Tomaso Antonio composed a set of [12] *Concerto di sonate* Op. 4 (vn, vc, bc, Modena, 1701), chamber sonatas of which the last comprises variations on the 'folia' theme. Pietro degli Antonii, another notable Cazzati disciple, included stylised dances in his Opp. 1 (1670) and 3 (1671). Although these are significant in the evolution of the *sonata da camera*, his sonatas Opp. 4 and 5 (vn, bc, 1676 and 1686) in the church style – organ is specified as the continuo keyboard instrument – are more progressive, their four or five movements incorporating vocal inflections and instrumental recitatives or ariosos into their violin writing. Furthermore, the continuo line assumes greater importance, often developing thematic material on an equal level with the violin part.

Corelli represents an early peak in the development of the solo sonata. His twelve sonatas Op. 5 (Rome, 1700) became by far the most influential of their time, appearing in some forty-two different editions by the end of the century.¹² Arranged in two sets of six sonatas, Nos. 1–6 inclusive ostensibly adopt the slow–fast–slow–fast scheme of the *sonata da chiesa* while Nos. 7–12 represent theoretically the *da camera* kind, the twelfth comprising the famous 'Follia' variations. However, the differences between the two sets are not as clear-cut in practice. Indeed, the

range from his Italian heritage to German models, as displayed in the elaborate contrapuntal textures of his set of twelve, Op. 1 (vn, bc, Dresden, 1721), comprising six minor-key chamber sonatas and six major-key church sonatas. A previous set of twelve (1716) is of more Italianate character, involving little counterpoint and much repetition. His most celebrated collection, the twelve so-called *Sonate accademiche* Op. 2 (1744), written probably for Italian private concerts (*accademie*) rather than being especially 'academic',¹⁶ represents a compromise between his Italian sonata and operatic (aria) influence and an increasingly elaborate contrapuntal technique in the German manner. Some movements are given curious titles (e.g. 'Aria Schiavonna', 'Cotillion', 'Schozeze', 'Polonese') and Veracini implies in his preface that a certain flexibility is allowable in performance. He suggests that two or three movements might be selected from the four or five provided 'to comprise a sonata of just proportions'. The preface also includes a table of notation signs, by means of which Veracini specifies such interpretative details as sonority, texture, dynamics and even bowing.

Porpora's twelve sonatas (vn, bc, Vienna, 1754) were some of the latest to uphold the Baroque tradition. By contrast, some of Locatelli's later works in the genre, like those of Tartini, embrace characteristics of the *galant* style. All but one of the twelve *Sonate da camera* Op. 6 (Amsterdam, 1737) adopt an original design: a fast, contrapuntal movement in binary form being flanked by a binary slow/moderate movement and a set of variations, commonly on a minuet theme. The exception is the twelfth, a five-movement piece which culminates in a 'Capriccio, prova del intonazione'. Of Locatelli's ten sonatas Op. 8 (Amsterdam, 1744), four are trio sonatas.

Great Britain

The actual seeds of sonata growth in Britain were sown by such violinist-composers as Matteis¹⁷ and Playford¹⁸ and germinated by the pre-eminence of the Italian style,¹⁹ hastened by the remarkable influx of Italian violinists in the early eighteenth century. Among those who spent much of their working lives in London were Corelli's pupils Castrucci (two sets of twelve sonatas, vn, bc), Carbonelli (*Sonate da camera*, c.1722) and, most important, Geminiani, who arrived in London in 1714 and was responsible for two collections of twelve sonatas (vn, bc; Op. 1, 1716; Op. 4, 1739) as well as numerous arrangements of his own and others' works in the genre.²⁰ Not surprisingly, Corelli provides the model for these works,²¹ which adopt the familiar four-movement pattern. But Geminiani's Opp. 1 and 4 are more adventurous harmonically, melodically, technically, rhythmically and dramatically, and he often inserted cadenza-like passages (either written out

distinction between the church and chamber varieties gradually disappeared. Although nominally *da camera*, the two sets of twelve sonatas (Opp. 1, c.1708, and 4, 1716) for violin and cello of Evaristo Dall' Abaco, for example, comprise a mix of abstract and dance movements, mostly in the Corellian four-movement pattern. During this period, the twelve sonatas (vn, bc, 1701) of Lonati are progressive, betraying certain German characteristics in their exploitation of high position-work, double stopping and *scordatura*, while the popular instrumental works of Valentini are particularly adventurous from technical, harmonic and tonal standpoints, especially his 12 *Allettamenti per camera* Op. 8 (vn, bc, 1714).

In Venice, Albinoni and Vivaldi were foremost in the development of the genre. Albinoni's output includes seventy-nine sonatas for between one and six instruments and continuo, written in church, chamber or mixed styles. Most significant here are his 12 *Trattenimenti armonici per camera* Op. 6 (Amsterdam, 1711), the only set of sonatas for violin and continuo that the composer himself prepared for the press. These works display the post-Corellian mix of church and chamber varieties, adopting the four-movement sequence of the church sonata and the binary fast movements derived from the dance of the chamber type. Although three other collections of Albinoni's violin sonatas appeared during his lifetime, 'there is evidence in each case that the publisher obtained manuscripts of the sonatas at second hand'.¹³

Vivaldi's sonatas for violin and continuo are mostly in a composite church-chamber mould in which the chamber elements are predominant, although dance forms may be re-ordered. His Op. 2 collection (Amsterdam, 1712-13) is the most significant, Vivaldi acknowledging the influence of Corelli's Op. 5 by modelling the opening of Op. 2 No. 2 on that of the first of Corelli's set. Of Vivaldi's other works in the genre, his Op. 5 collection (Amsterdam, c.1716), comprising four sonatas (vn, bc) and two trio sonatas, is most significant. The vn-bc sonatas begin with a prelude and continue with two or three dance-titled movements.

As a pupil of Corelli (and possibly also Vivaldi) and teacher of Pugnani (mentor of Viotti) and some of the leading French violinist-composers of the century (Leclair, Guillemain, Guignon, etc.), Somis was a central figure in the development of the violin repertory. Only his solo and trio sonatas were published during his lifetime, among them sixty works (vn, bc) published in five sets each of twelve (c.1717; Op. 2, 1723; Op. 4, 1726; Op. 6, 1733; c.1740). The character of the chamber variety predominates, but with few dance titles, and most adopt a three-movement slow-fast-fast pattern.¹⁴ With the reduction in the number of movements, greater emphasis appears to have been placed on the first fast movement in the scheme. Somis expanded it into a 'three-section form—a statement, a digression and an abbreviated reprise in the principal key, comparable to an incipient sonata form in the Classical sense'.¹⁵

The sonatas of Veracini betray a number of separate influences. These

over a continuo pedal, or merely implied by a fermata) in which the violinist might further assert his technique and musicianship.

Richard Jones is notable for two collections (vn, bc): *Chamber Air's ... The Preludes being written (chiefly) in the Grace Manner* Op. 2 (London, c.1736) and *Six Suites of Lessons* Op. 3 (London, c.1741). These comprise full-scale, Italianate sonatas of both *da chiesa* and *da camera* types (eight in Op. 2 and six in Op. 3) in an unusually advanced technical idiom for their time and origin. His (and later Geminiani's) pupil Michael Festing also left more than thirty sonatas (vn, bc) in five collections (1730–c.1750). Most comprise four movements (slow–fast–slow–fast) and follow Geminiani's model in incorporating some elaborate ornamentation, especially in their graceful slow movements. John Stanley's two collections of *Solo's* (fl or vn, bc) Opp. 1 and 4 (London, 1740 and 1745) are also sonatas in all but name.

The Berlin-born Pepusch's sonatas are of two types: a traditional four-movement kind and one with contrasts of tempo (particularly in the first movement), a more variable overall design and titled dances, which are often subjected to variations. But the principal German influence in England was Handel, whose sonatas (vn, bc) have a complex history. Chrysander, editor of the *Händel-Gesellschaft* (1879), grouped together some fifteen sonatas as Handel's Op. 1, but the authenticity of many of these works has been refuted by numerous Handelians.²² Roger of Amsterdam published twelve sonatas as Handel's Op. 1 (c.1722) in an edition highly inaccurate as regards key, instrumentation and other details, and Walsh reprinted the set with a false imprint (1730). Walsh produced a corrected edition in 1732, but the two sonatas included as Nos. 10 and 12 in Roger's and Walsh's second publication are different and neither pair is now thought to have been composed by Handel. Furthermore, three completely authentic sonatas have not, until very recently, been recognised as such, and Handelians nowadays only claim five sonatas (vn, bc), all but one in four movements, to be unquestionably by Handel: that in A major (Op. 1 No. 3, 1724–6); the D minor violin version of the E minor sonata for recorder (Op. 1 No. 1, c.1720–4); the sonata in G minor (Op. 1 No. 6, c.1720–4) described as 'oboe solo' but prescribed for violin solo in the autograph in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (where it succeeds the D minor arrangement in the same source); the lively, three-movement G major sonata (c.1707) and the late D major sonata (Chrysander's Op. 1 No. 13, c.1750).

Germany

Early developments in the German violin repertory owed much to the efforts of immigrants from Italy (Marini from 1623; Carlo Farina, 1625), and England (Thomas Simpson, 1610; Rowe, 1614; and Brade, c.1600), who founded the Hamburg school. Brade's student Nicolaus Bleyer's set

of ostinato variations on *Est-ce Mars* (c.1650) was one of the earliest German pieces for violin and continuo, while Johann Kindermann's set of [27] *Canzoni*, [9] *sonatae* (1653) included pieces for one to three violins, cello and continuo and exploited *scordatura* as an expressive resource. Johann Rosenmüller proved a significant figure in the dissemination of Italian styles throughout Northern Germany, particularly in his last two collections for various instrumental combinations of strings.²³ Many of Buxtehude's solo and ensemble sonatas are reminiscent of Rosenmüller's 1682 collection in the harmonic intensity of their slow, transitional homophonic sections. Buxtehude's close associate Johann Reincken's *Hortus musicus* (Hamburg, 1687) is also significant for its six sonatas (2vn, va da gamba, bc) which demonstrate characteristics of both solo sonata and suite.

Schmelzer's *Sonatae unarum fidium* ... (Nuremberg, 1664) was the first published collection devoted entirely to sonatas (vn, bc) from the German-speaking countries. A synthesis of Italian and German elements, these six sonatas are founded largely on the variation principle (notably ground bass variations) and comprise numerous sections in contrasting metres and tempos with some challenging passage-work for the violinist.

Biber was the outstanding German violin virtuoso of the seventeenth century. His eight *Sonatae violino solo* (vn, bc, Nuremberg, 1681) combine the variation principle (chaconne basses, variants of arias, or doubles of dances) with freer, more improvisatory passages such as those in the toccata-like preludes and brilliant, elaborate finales. He by far outstripped his Italian (and German) contemporaries with his technical demands (up to seventh position, double stopping, varied bowings, *scordatura* etc. *Scordatura* plays a more prominent role in Biber's sixteen 'Mystery' (or 'Rosary') Sonatas (c.1675), which depict the fifteen 'Sacred Mysteries' of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Only two of these pieces employ the conventional violin tuning by fifths, each of the others using a different tuning and thereby offering a wide range of unusual chord combinations and sonorities. Though conceived as church music,²⁴ these sonatas include several stylised dance movements (gavotte, gigue, courante and sarabande) counterbalanced by movements in contrapuntal style. Some of the sonatas show programmatic tendencies²⁵ but musical considerations predominate. The sixteenth piece is the famous *Passacaglia* for violin solo.

Next to Biber, Johann Walther was the most adventurous and virtuosic of contemporary violinist-composers in the German-speaking countries. Most of his twelve *Scherzi* ... (vn, bc, Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1676) are in free form, with sudden changes of tempo and metre. Eight bear the title 'sonata', while two others (Nos. 5 and 12) are labelled 'aria'. Dance movements and variation sets predominate in his other published collection, *Hortulus chelicus* (Mainz, 1688), and a programmatic element occasionally provides additional interest.²⁶

Johann von Westhoff also used programmatic devices in his sonatas,²⁷ which are of advanced technical demand. Although individual movements are repetitious and the sonatas fail to conform to any set movement plan, unity and interest are often provided by a less conventional adaptation of the variation principle, one movement sometimes comprising a variant of its predecessor.²⁸

By composing a set of six sonatas for violin with obbligato keyboard²⁹ J. S. Bach triggered off the gradual demise of the sonata for violin and continuo, even though that genre was perpetuated well into the eighteenth century by such German composers as Kirchoff, Birkenstock, Heinichen and Pisendel. The first five of Bach's set (BWV 1014–18) adopt the regular four-movement design of the *sonata da chiesa*, the fast movements being largely fugue-like or at least highly imitative. The sixth (BWV 1019) has a complex history. Two earlier versions are at variance with that firmly established as the final form.³⁰ The version normally performed nowadays comprises five movements, only the first two of which remain from the earlier two versions. The overall three-part texture of these sonatas is largely akin to that of the trio sonata, the violinist and the harpsichordist's right hand taking the two upper parts and the harpsichordist's left hand contributing the bass line. However, a few brief sections remain where the harpsichordist is required to realise the figured harmonies.³¹

Bach also composed some works for violin and continuo. The G major sonata (BWV 1021), discovered in 1928, follows the *da chiesa* pattern, while the four-movement E minor sonata (BWV 1023) combines elements of the 'church sonata' and Baroque suite. The authenticity of the *da chiesa* C minor sonata (BWV 1024) is open to doubt,³² while the F major sonata (BWV 1022) is basically an arrangement of an arrangement. Its bass line is essentially that of the G major sonata (BWV 1021), but the two upper parts derive from the G major trio sonata (BWV 1038), a reworking of BWV 1021 probably by one of Bach's pupils.

Despite the esteem in which J. S. Bach is held nowadays, Telemann was widely regarded as Germany's leading composer in the early and mid eighteenth century. Much of his instrumental music promoted the cause of music-making in the home, notably his two collections of six (vn, bc) sonatas each (Frankfurt, 1715 and 1718). More important still are his *Essercizii musici overo dodeci soli e dodeci trii* (Hamburg, 1739–40), *Solos Op. 2* (London, c.1725), *XII Solos* (vn or fl, bc, Hamburg, 1734), and *Sonate metodiche Op. 13* (vn or fl, bc), issued in two sets of six (Hamburg, 1728 and 1732). The 'methodical' or instructive intent of this latter collection is provided in the suggested written-out melodic elaborations of the opening movements of each sonata. Other sonatas (vn, bc) by Telemann may be found in such collections as *Der getreue Music-Meister* (Hamburg, 1728–9) and *Musique de table* (Hamburg, 1733).

Pisendel's synthesis of German and Italian traditions was taken to

Berlin by his pupils J. G. Graun and Franz Benda. Graun published a set of six sonatas (vn, bc, Merseburg, c.1726). Benda, a pupil also of Graun, claimed in his autobiography (1763) to have written eighty violin sonatas, most of them composed before 1751. Apart from a set of Six Sonatas Op. 1 (vn, bc, Paris, 1763), few of his works were published during his lifetime.

France

The violin's potential as a solo instrument remained virtually untapped in France during the seventeenth century, largely because the string orchestra was the focus of attention, especially for its role in dance music. By 1609 there were already 'Vingt-deux Violons Ordinaires de la Chambre du Roi', and in 1626 Louis XIII established the band of the Vingt-quatre Violons du Roi, some thirty years before Lully's rival ensemble, the Petits Violons (1656).

Italian instrumental music appears to have gained popularity in French musical circles during the 1690s,³³ and Corelli's music was certainly known after 1700. Significant in the development of the 'solo' sonata at this time were François Duval and Jean-Féry Rebel, both prominent members of Louis XIV's Vingt-quatre Violons du Roi. Duval was the first Frenchman to compose sonatas for violin and continuo, publishing some seven collections (1704-20)³⁴ which blend French dance elements with more advanced Italian instrumental techniques. The five sonatas (vn, bc) at the end of Rebel's *Recueil de douze sonates à II et III parties*,³⁵ are also among the earliest French examples, along with those of Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre and Brossard. Further sonata collections by Rebel were published in Paris in 1705³⁶ and 1713.³⁷

The influx of Italian violinists into Paris in the early eighteenth century furthered the cause of Italian music in the French capital, which became even more attractive to foreign virtuosi with the establishment of the Concert Spirituel in 1725. Prominent among the immigrant Italians were Mascitti, Piani,³⁸ and Guignon.³⁹ Mascitti published nine collections of sonatas (vn, bc, mostly of the *da camera* variety) between 1704 and 1738 which comprise about one hundred works in the genre. Guignon published eighteen sonatas (twelve in Op. 1, 1737, six in Op. 6, after 1742), mostly in the three-movement form of the Italian opera *sinfonia*, while Piani's collection of twelve sonatas Op. 1 (six for vn, bc, six for vn or fl, bc), is notable both for the composer's preface, which includes detailed interpretative information, and the unusually thorough markings annotated in the works themselves.

The synthesis of French and Italian styles was also hastened by the exodus of French violinists such as Senaillé, Anet and Tremais to study in Italy. Senaillé composed at least fifty sonatas (vn, bc), published in five books between 1710 and 1727, while Tremais's sonatas (vn, bc), mostly