

He was the first owner of my cello by William Forster Junior (See file on Forster).

**Sources:** Wikipedia; Groves music; Michael Talbot, *Some Notes on the Life of Jacob Cervetto*.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265715351\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265715351_)

**Biography.** James Cervetto was born in London in 1748 and died in London in 1837. He was an English cellist, son of Giacobbe Basevi Cervetto and Elizabeth Cervetto. His father taught him the cello. He first appeared in a concert of child prodigies at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket on 23 April 1760 with other musicians of similar age (including Gertrud Elisabeth Mara, at this time playing violin, later a soprano). Between 1763 and 1770 he is said to have travelled abroad, playing in most European capitals. In 1771 he became the principal cellist in the queen's private band, and he joined Lord Abingdon's orchestra in 1780, taking part in the Professional Concerts from 1783 to 1794. He was a member of the Concert of Ancient Music, begun in 1776 by a group of gentlemen and aristocrats as a concert series that would conserve and perform the best of an older tradition of European music, out of a concern to distinguish "serious" music from the more popular music of the playhouses. He was a member of the Royal Society of Musicians for 72 years. He was a principal in the orchestra at Handel's Commemoration (1784). Between 1773 and 1781 he took part in various concerts at the Salisbury Festival. From about 1774 he played at the King's Theatre and was admired for his skilful accompaniment of recitatives: Banvard records 'It was his [the Prince of Wales] delight to attend the Italian opera merely to hear Cervetto's accompaniments of the recitatives which were acknowledged to be unrivalled'. Although he inherited £20,000 in 1783, he remained an active performer in London and the provinces, participating in concerts with some of the best musicians of his day. His last known concert took place on 2 March 1795 at Frederick, Duke of York's residence York House, Picadilly, at which Haydn was introduced to King George III.

Charles Burney, music historian and friend of Haydn, described him as 'the matchless Cervetto', stated that while in the early part of his career he was in friendly rivalry with the cellist John Crosdill. Still a child he played 'in a manner much more chantant than his father. Arrived at manhood, his tone and expression were equal to those of the best tenor voices'. He and John Crosdill were the foremost cellists of their generation in Britain. They were often compared with one another, and J.-L. Duport's playing was reported to have been inferior to theirs. According to the press, Cervetto lost his favourite cello, worth 300 guineas, in the King's Theatre fire in 1789. James Cervetto died in London on 5 February 1837, "leaving," wrote George Grove, "a few unimportant pieces for his instrument behind him". Amongst his legatees were the architect George Basevi and Maria D'Israeli (née Basevi), the mother of the politician Benjamin Disraeli.

From an article\* about the first performance of Haydn's D major concerto: The soloist of the premiere, James Cervetto, was the son of the Italian Jewish immigrant and noted cellist Jacob Cervetto. Cervetto the younger was the principal cellist of the Italian Opera in London and one of England's leading solo cellists, known for his tone and expression 'equal to the best tenor voices' as well as his brilliant virtuosity. As one of the early proponents of thumb position (including the use of the fourth finger in thumb position!) he could easily sightread violin parts at pitch when the need arose in chamber music. Haydn did not travel to London for the performances and is likely that the parts used for the premiere and a repeat performance one week later were destroyed to protect Haydn's rights, as was the case with Abingdon's other Haydn commissions. Reviews of the concerto's 1784 debut emphasize how Haydn's score was ideally matched to Cervetto's strengths, particularly his expressive cantabile lyricism and florid virtuosity. \*<https://slippedisc.com/2021/02/the-cellist-in-haydns-concerto-was-a-london-jew/>

## James Cervetto gave the first performance of Haydn's D major Cello concerto

**Sources:** Various sources, including Wikipedia, based on an article published online by Cambridge University Press: 14 February 2019 by Thomas Tolley.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/eighteenth-century-music/article/james-cervetto-and-the-origin-of-haydns-d-major-cello-concerto/821ABC429E57CF1D23BF68F829B96568>;

<https://slippedisc.com/2021/02/the-cellist-in-haydns-concerto-was-a-london-jew/>

<https://www.philorch.org/globalassets/philadelphia-orchestra/pdp/2022-23/program-notes/book-12-mahlers-symphony-no.-4.pdf>

Haydn's D major cello concerto, regarded as one of the greatest works for cello of the classical era, has traditionally been associated with Anton Kraft, a cellist in Haydn's orchestra at Eszterházy during the 1780s. Many authorities had accepted apparent evidence that Kraft was the concerto's composer and its first performer. This was due to an assertion to this effect by Kraft's son to musicologist Gustav Schilling, and later repeated in Schilling's influential musical encyclopedias. However, original advertisements in the London press announced that 'A new Concerto, for Violoncello, to be played by Mr James Cervetto, composed by Haydn' had its premier on March 24, 1784 at Hannover Square. (The C major concerto was, at this point, more than twenty years old). The concert series at Hanover Square in London was presented by Willoughby Bertie, 4th Earl of Abingdon, an amateur flautist and composer, who commissioned several new works by Haydn to present during his 1783 and 1784 concert series. Both the distinctive characteristics of the concerto, often regarded by commentators as indications of compositional weakness, and also its exceptional technical challenges are interpreted as responses to the distinguished virtuoso James Cervetto's singular musical temperament and exceptional proficiency. In fabricating his claim to be the first performer (and even composer) of the concerto, Kraft fabricated the date of Cervetto's death as 1804. In fact he died in about 1837.

James Cervetto was the first owner of my Forster Cello (see below) but it was made in 1809 so was not used in the first performance of the Haydn concerto.

### Compositions of James Cervetto

I cannot now find the source for this: Cervetto's op.1 solos differ little in style from his father's works: they have a figured bass for harpsichord, some have cadenzas, and the last has a minuet and variations. His other solos are for cello and 'a bass', and so may be considered to be duets, though without equality of the parts: arrangements of three of the solos by Robert Lindley, whom Cervetto taught (gratis) in the early 1790s, do in fact transform them into duets proper, by changing the parts around on alternate phrases. Cervetto's op.3 solos are different from those of op.1, their melodic lines being more direct and the rhythms more four-square. They include much rapid passagework and are more demanding for the player than the op.4 sonatinas, which were obviously intended for amateur use. The divertiments for two cellos are all in two movements, generally slow-fast, with the second either a rondo or a minuet, and appear to have had a didactic purpose. Opp.5 and 6 are much more advanced. All are in three or four movements, and two have slow introductions. Sonata form is handled with more assurance, the development of thematic material is less predictable, and the two-part texture resourcefully varied. Cervetto here makes great technical demands on the cello, reaching f<sup>♯</sup> and employing more double stopping.

Classical composers database with a list of his music and sources <https://musicalics.com/en/node/79305>

His compositions from ScorSer (they can be downloaded from here):

<http://en.instr.scorser.com/C/All/Cervetto%2C+James/Divertimento/Alphabetically.html>

Music by James Cervetto downloaded from IMSLIP; this includes 6 sonatas for flute and ground bass cello): [https://imslp.org/wiki/6\\_Cello\\_Sonatas%2C\\_Op.3\\_\(Cervetto%2C\\_James\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/6_Cello_Sonatas%2C_Op.3_(Cervetto%2C_James))

Available on Ebay Three sonatas for 2 cellos or violin and cello (beautifully printed for easy playing):

<https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/353904069984?hash=item5266538d60:g:3e4AAOSwIAhiBTPD>

<https://www.prestomusic.com/classical/products/9308511--the-golden-age-of-the-cello-in-britain-1760-1810>

Performance: James Cervetto (1748-1837) - Solo (II) for the violoncello and a bass (1768) on

YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE-q3GUHBlw&ab\\_channel=PauNG](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE-q3GUHBlw&ab_channel=PauNG)

## Pictures of Cervetto



A Bravura at the Hanover Square Concert by John Nixon. Pen and ink and brown wash, 1789

In the National Portrait Gallery.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitExtended/mw01165/A-Bravura-at-the-Hanover-Square-Concert>

Between 1783 and 1793, the Hanover Square Rooms in London (a joint venture by J. C. Bach and C. F. Abel) hosted a series of concerts which featured some of the most fashionable Italian musicians of the day. Pictured here are Luigi Marchesini, called Marchesini, one of the last great 'castrati', and the cellist, James Cervetto. Below them in the pit the artist has drawn a vignette of members of the audience. An unidentified member of the aristocracy wearing the sash and star of the garter can be seen in addition to a gentleman whose face, much like Marchesini's, bears the scars of smallpox. Hidden in the shadows at the far left is the cellist's father, the musician Giacobbe Cervetto, listening intently to his son's playing.

The website description of the painting: [Giacomo \[James\] Cervetto II](#) (1747/9-1837), an Italian\* 'cellist, was a pupil of Abel in London in 1760, and from 1780 played at the professional concerts at the Hanover Square Rooms. An inscription below in the hand *Duke of Cumberland 1791*, apparently identifying the left-hand foreground seated figure wearing a (vestigial) Garter ribbon and star as Henry, Duke of Cumberland (1745-90; KG 1767), the rather foolish brother of George III, who was nevertheless musical and owned a collection of musical instruments; the likeness is, however, perfunctory. It has also been suggested that the shadowy profile in the bottom left corner of the drawing evoked Giacobbe Cervetto (c.1682-1783), the cellist's deceased father. \*Note: Giacobbe Cervetto (James's father) was Italian but his son was English, born in London in 1748.



A Self-Portrait of Johann Zoffany with His Daughter Maria Theresa, with James Cervetto, and Giacobbe Cervetto (James's father) looking on. Circa 1780. Oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, USA. Circa 1780. Note: he is using difficult thumb position.

From Wikipedia: <https://www.alamy.com/johann-zoffany-self-portrait-with-his-daughter-maria-theresa-james-cervetto-and-giacobbe-cervetto-circa-1780-oil-on-canvas-yale-center-for-brit-image220398451.html>



A Sunday concert by Charles Loraine Smith (of Enderby), published by M. Rack etching and aquatint, published 4 June 1782. Cervetto is shown with a poor representation of his cello in the front left. The others, including the music historian (Burney) can be identified on the source website: Again, too early for this to show my Forster cello.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw68327/A-Sunday-concert>