

## SPECIAL FEATURE on JEAN-BAPTISTE BREVAL

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Birth: 6th November, 1753 (Paris)

Death: 18th March, 1823 (Colligis, Aisne, France)

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Jean-Baptiste Sébastien Breval was an outstanding French cellist and composer of his day. He studied cello with Jean-Baptiste Cupis and Martin Berteau. By 1774, he was active as a cello teacher. In 1775, he published his Opus 1, six concertante quartets. In 1776, he became a member of the «Société Académique des Enfants d'Apollon».

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In 1778 he made his official debut at a Concert Spirituel performing one of his own sonatas; subsequently he was a member of its orchestra from 1781 to 1791. He then played in the orchestra of the Théâtre Feydeau (1791–1800). Later he became involved in the administration of the «Concerts de la rue de Cléry» and a member of the Paris Opera orchestra. He retired from the orchestra in 1816.

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He composed a great quantity of instrumental music, including symphonies, cello concertos, string quartets, trios, duos, and sonatas. Before 1784 his works were usually two or three movement compositions in more simple style, but the mature compositions after that reflected the Parisian love for graceful melodies and more energetic rhythms. His cello concertos (6 of them!) were almost surely written for his own performance, and these were influenced by G.B. Viotti in that they employed a precise thematic organization interjected with virtuosic passages. He also wrote an opéra-comique, “Ines et Leonore”, performed in Versailles on 14th November, 1788. In fact, his much later works, such as Symphonie concertante for clarinet, horn and bassoon, Op. 38 (c1795), show increased diversity and experimentation.

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It is sometimes said that he was a conservatoire professor although this cannot be verified. However, Bréval's compositions were definitely used for instruction at the Conservatoire (or at various conservatoires).

Bréval is still most well known for his Sonata in C major Op. 40, No. 1, which is one of the classics of student cello literature, and very often one of the first full sonatas a cello student will learn. I well remember playing it myself as a kid!! The original version is available from several different publishers. Mention should be made of the David Johnstone version for TWO CELLOS which works very well (although I say so myself!) as a duo work. See here:

<https://johnstone-music.com/product/breval-sonata-in-c-major-two-cellos/?lang=en>

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With regard to teaching material perhaps his most important and influential work was 'Traité du Violoncelle' dating from 1804, an important cello method - maybe the first really systematic treatise on the cello. It was partially translated into English some six years later. However, on its own day it was not specially well-received as it seemed to overlook the increasing technical advances in the design of the cello that allowed for greater virtuosity on the instrument.

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Listing of the CELLO CONCERTOS of BREVAL:

Concerto No. 1, in A, Op. 14 (1784)

Concerto No. 2, in D, Op. 17 (1784)

Concerto No. 3, in F, Op. 20 (1785)

Concerto No. 4, in C, Op. 22 (1786)

Concerto No. 5, Op. 24 (1786)

Concerto No. 6, in C, Op. 26 (1786)

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A delight to finish with, if you don't know this!:

Breval - Concertino No.3 in A Major - First Movement

"Leonard Bernstein presents 7-year-old Yo-Yo Ma's high-profile debut for President John F. Kennedy - a 7-year-old Chinese cellist called Yo-yo Ma, who was brought to the program's attention by Casals."

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=7&v=dNvAUobb1y4&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=dNvAUobb1y4&feature=emb_logo)

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‘documenting the cello’

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