

# Cellists' Corner

## Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

*prepared by David Johnstone from public information*

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## SPECIAL FEATURE on MARTIN BERTEAU

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Martin Berteau was said to have given up the great French tradition of bass viol-playing in favour of the cello after hearing the Italian cellist Francischello. He began, as did other French cellists of his day, on the viola da gamba, and later maintained to have learned the cello while in Bohemia. He probably studied viola da gamba in Germany with the Bohemian, Kozecz, before turning definitively to the 'modern' cello. Martin Berteau was thereafter an extremely successful cellist and teacher.

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However, descriptions of Berteau's life are often unreliable and exaggerated. As a result, little is certain about his life. Charismatic and popular, seemingly every fame-seeking cellist in France at the time claimed to have been his student; and verifiable accounts show he taught at least several of the more important cellists of the next generation. He was also the subject of many word-of-mouth anecdotes from the following century that are completely unverifiable, such as claims that he was a constant drinker even during performance!

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With the exception of a few cello sonatas, much of Berteau's work has been lost. Also, many of his compositions were considered doubtful as well. Indeed, his earliest published works, a collection of cello sonatas from 1748, were erroneously attributed to "Sgr. Martino." And a G Major Sonata was only a hundred years ago credited as a work by Giovanni Sammartini. It was as late as 1989 that a second edition of the sonatas, published in 1772, was discovered with "Martino Berteau" listed as the composer, and therefore with conclusive arguments presented in his favour.

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Among his students were:

Louis, Dauphin of France (son of Louis XV),

The Valencian brothers Jean-Baptiste Janson (1742-1804) and Louis Auguste Joseph (1749-1815),

Joseph Rey (1738-1811),

Jean-Pierre Duport, known as "l'Aîné" (1741-1818),

Joseph Tillière, author of a "Méthode pour le cello" published in 1764,

François Cupis de Renoussard, cellist and composer,

Jean-Baptiste Bréval (1753-1823) - most certainly his last student.

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Martin Berteau is aptly credited with creating the French school of cello playing.

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