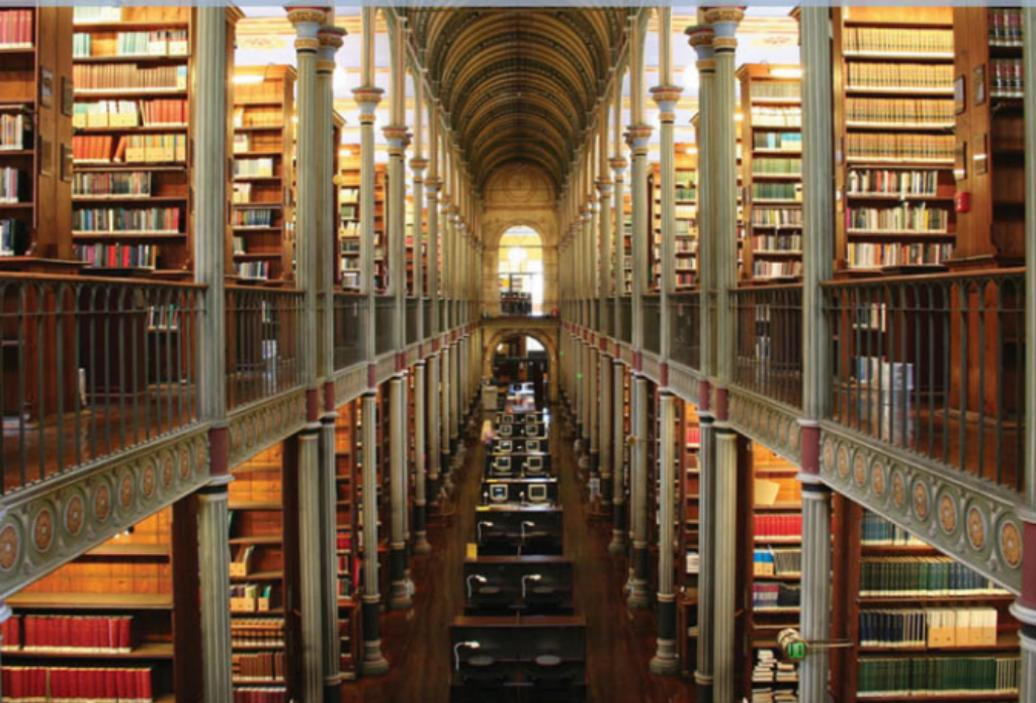


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The Life of Giovanni Battista Viotti

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*Frontispiece.* Portrait of Viotti by Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, 1805, from a reproduction in the *Connoisseur*, November 1911. The present location of this painting, if it has survived, is unknown.

*Votre affectueux Amis.*

*Amico* 

 The Life of  
Giovanni Battista Viotti

WARWICK LISTER

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*Dedicated to the memory of my parents*

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## Preface

THERE EXISTS NO FULL-SCALE BIOGRAPHY IN ENGLISH OF GIOVANNI Battista Viotti, who was arguably the most influential violinist who ever lived. The monographs by Arthur Pougin (1888), in French, and Remo Giazotto (1956), in Italian, are inadequate, the first because much new information has come to light since its publication, the second because of its many errors and fabrications. Two more recent monographs are Rosy Moffa, “*Vo triste tacito*”: *Le peregrinazioni di Giovanni Battista Viotti* (Lucca, 2005), and Mariateresa Dellaborra, *Giovanni Battista Viotti* (Palermo, 2006), both in Italian. Denise Yim’s excellent *Viotti and the Chinnerys: A Relationship Charted through Letters* (Aldershot, 2004) concentrates on Viotti’s life after his move to England in 1792. It has two much-less detailed chapters on the preceding years, and, as Yim says in her introduction, it does “not discuss in any detail the entrepreneurial aspects of Viotti’s life.” The volume *Giovanni Battista Viotti: A Composer between the Two Revolutions*, edited by Massimiliano Sala (Bologna, 2006), is a collection of articles by various authors, not by any means a biography. Mention should be made of an important collection of research materials compiled by Hans-Jürgen Rydzyk in the 1980s and 1990s, held by the Music History Department of the Freie Universität Berlin. Rydzyk, whose (uncompleted) PhD dissertation was on the chamber works of Viotti, had begun work on a critical edition of the complete works of Viotti, but this was cut short by his untimely death.

This is a “Life,” not a “Life and Works.” I have simply tried to tell all that is known about the life and career of Viotti, and to place his career in the context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century musical life. There are no extended analyses of Viotti’s works, no music examples (other than two short occasional pieces that I thought to include since they are not only unpublished but also have hitherto been unremarked in the Viotti literature). The works are

brought into the context of his life as it has seemed appropriate. I draw partly on articles I have already published in scholarly publications. There is much new material, however, some of it appearing for the first time in English, or based on newly uncovered documents, particularly regarding Viotti's parents and siblings, his career in Turin, the whereabouts of Viotti and his teacher in Poland and Russia, and Viotti's activities in Paris and London.

All dates are given in New Style. Thus I have rendered as 20 March the date recorded in a Russian newspaper as 9 March 1781, to conform to the Gregorian calendar (New Style) in use in western Europe, which at this time was eleven days ahead of the Julian calendar (Old Style) in use in Poland and Russia. I have done this to render the chronology of Viotti and Pugnani's trip more comprehensible.

To avoid clutter, I have not always given note references for dictionary articles when it is clear which article is being referred to (for example, the Miel, Fétis, and *New Grove* articles on Viotti and others). Similarly, I have provided the original texts of translated passages only when the form of words seemed important or ambiguous.

I gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint portions of the following articles (see the bibliography): Lister 2003 (in chapter 1); Lister 2002 (in chapter 2); Lister 2004 and Lister 2006 (in chapter 3). I am grateful to the Russian-Baltic Information Center (BLITZ) research team in St. Petersburg, headed by Elena Tsvetkova, in connection with the Russian archival findings in chapter 2, and specifically the citations indicated in notes 63, 66, 82, 84, 87, 88, and 89 in chapter 2; note 48 in chapter 3; and note 155 in chapter 9. For help with the translation of Russian sources I am grateful to Igor Polesitsky; for Polish sources, to Urszula Szczepanska-Janowska and Agnieszka Jelewska; and for some of the thornier Italian passages, to Marco Chiarini. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French, Italian, and German are mine.

Every student of the life of Viotti owes an enormous debt to Denise Yim. It was she who brought under control the sprawling Chinnery-Viotti collections (The Chinnery Family Papers) in the Powerhouse Museum and the Fisher Library in Sydney, Australia, and in the Christ Church College Library, Oxford, and who, in masterly fashion, synthesized their contents, first in her two-volume doctoral dissertation, then in her book, mentioned above, which also draws upon the correspondence in the New York Public Library, uncovered by Frances Barulich. I personally am greatly indebted to Denise Yim, in particular for her help with the translation of several French sources, for her help with many problematic points, and for sharing her extensive knowledge of Viotti and the Viotti literature, all of which, I fear, has been inadequately acknowledged in the present book. More generally, her advice and the stimulation of her ideas and enthusiasm in all that concerns Viotti have been an inspiration to me, for which I am immensely grateful.

I thank Clive Brown for his helpful comments on Viotti's violin playing, its antecedents, and its influence. Any flaws or errors remaining in my treatment of this area are of course my responsibility entirely. I am also grateful to Professor Brown for generously sending me a copy of his article "Leopold Mozart's *Violinschule* and the Performance of W. A. Mozart's Violin Music," which helped clarify my thinking on the context of Viotti's style of violin playing.

Others whose help I gratefully acknowledge include Don Guido Mazza of the parrocchia di S. Martino Vescovo, Fontanetto Po and Don Natalino of the church of S. Bartolomeo, Trino, for their help with parochial archives; Romana Raina for generously sending me photocopies of documents from her thesis and sharing with me her knowledge of the archives of Fontanetto; Dr. Roland Folter for sharing his expertise on old auction catalogues and for his help in my efforts (in the end unsuccessful) to trace a letter quoted in Giazotto's book (see chapter 2, n. 93); Jeffrey Eger, who found several auction catalogue entries pertaining to Viotti; Marie Françoise Lagadec, who shared with me several of her discoveries in the French national archives; Giovanni Caselli for his patience and expertise in creating the maps; the staff at the Harold Acton Library of the British Institute of Florence, Frances Barulich, Mary Flagler Curator of Music Manuscripts and Printed Music, the Pierpont Morgan Library, Kathryn Bosi, Music Librarian of the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence (Villa I Tatti), Mrs. Judith Curthoys, Archivist, Christ Church College, Oxford, and Dr. Peter Horton, Reference Librarian, Royal College of Music, for their many kind and helpful courtesies; Ms. Helen Yoxall and Ms. Jill Chapman, archivists at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, who kindly provided workspace in their offices, gave me free access to the Chinnery Family Papers, and cheerfully tolerated my frequent interruptions during my visit; and Michael Barbour and Alyson Price for reading my manuscript and for their valuable suggestions.

To my wife, Susan, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for her patience, support, and advice, every step of the way.

This book is intended for the curious music lover, and I hope will also be of interest to musicologists and scholars in related fields, such as the cultural history of the *ancien régime*, and the French Revolution. I would be gratified to learn that, for the reader, as for myself, a knowledge of Viotti's life has sparked a sharper, less casual interest in his music, which sadly remains imprisoned in that oubliette of cultural history, "unjust neglect."

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## *Abbreviations*

See also the Bibliography.

AF	Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Cambridge
CC	Caroline Chinnery
GBV	Giovanni Battista Viotti
GRC	George Robert Chinnery
MC	Margaret Chinnery
WBC	William Bassett Chinnery
WGC	Walter Grenfell Chinnery
WRS	William Robert Spencer

*FétisB* F.-J. Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, 2nd ed. 8 vols. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1878.

*JAMS* *Journal of the American Musicological Society*.

*MGG1* *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Ed. Friedrich Blume. 17 vols. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1949–86.

*MGG2* *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. 2nd ed. Ed. Ludwig Finscher. 27 vols. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994–2008.

*NG1* *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. 20 vols. London: Macmillan, 1980.

*NG2* *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed. Ed. Stanley Sadie. 29 vols. London: Macmillan, 2001.

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*Fontanetto and Turin, 1755–79*

THE VILLAGE OF FONTANETTO LIES IN THE BROAD PLAIN OF THE river Po. Here Giovanni Battista Viotti was born on 12 May 1755, the sixth of nineteen children, of whom probably only seven survived infancy. As a boy playing in the street in front of his house he could look up and see, shimmering to the north, the great chain of the Alps, which runs southwestward to embrace the city of Turin, some thirty-five miles upstream, before turning south to meet the Mediterranean. Now, as in Viotti's time, Fontanetto Po<sup>1</sup> is surrounded, almost as far as the eye can see, by rice fields, for, since the Middle Ages, this part of Piedmont has been the largest rice producing area in Europe. In the tree-lined canal running through the main square of the village, hemp, the other local product, was brought from the nearby fields and macerated. Fontanetto Po has always been off the beaten track—to reach it one must make a detour from the main road between Turin to the west, and, twenty miles northeast of Fontanetto, Vercelli, the nearest large market town and provincial capital (see appendix 1).

Giovan<sup>2</sup> Battista's father, Felice Antonio Viotto (10 September 1714–6 January 1784),<sup>3</sup> was a blacksmith who plied his trade in the house belonging to the Viotto family since the late seventeenth century, when it had been acquired by the violinist's great-grandfather.<sup>4</sup> The house, on the former "contrada di mezzo," now Via Viotti, no. 23, near the crossroads at the center of the village, still stands. On its facade is a marble plaque commemorating the birthplace of Fontanetto's most illustrious son.

Our only source of information about the first decade or so of Viotti's life is a handwritten biographical note, 3½ pages long, dated 1810, by a certain Doctor Negri, deputy mayor of Fontanetto, who belonged to a prominent family of the

village, with friendly ties to the Viotto family.<sup>5</sup> We cannot improve upon Negri's account:

[Viotti's] father, though a blacksmith by trade, this being his only source of income, was a cultured man, who appreciated genteel and cultivated company; and as he was witty and something of a wag, he was well liked by everyone, and the gentlemen of the area, laymen and clergy alike, delighted in gathering in front of his shop to have a talk with him, and at not too late an hour they would also come into his house to be of the company. Indeed, since several of them were amateur players of one or another instrument it was a rare evening that they didn't gather at the Viotti home to make music, in which Master Felice himself also played the horn [*como da caccia*] reasonably well.

Of Viotti's mother, Maria Maddalena, née Milano (b. 15 January 1728), we know almost nothing, other than that she was from a local family. She married Felice on 24 February 1746, aged eighteen; their first child was born in November. All told she bore her husband three sons and six daughters, three of whom survived: Anna Adelaide, born in 1748, Giovan Battista, born in 1755, and Giuseppe, born in 1763. She died 22 April 1763, aged thirty-five, quite possibly of septicemia resulting from the birth of Giuseppe two months earlier. Giovan Battista was three weeks short of his eighth birthday when he lost his mother; his sister Adelaide was fourteen years old. Within a few months, on 30 October, Felice, now forty-nine years old, took another wife, the twenty-one-year-old Teresa Maria Musetti, from the nearby town of Trino. Teresa was herself a widow, her first husband having died three years earlier.<sup>6</sup>

It is pleasant to imagine the blacksmith, in his best suit, riding the five miles to be married in Trino on a misty October morning, perhaps bringing his two older children with him. Lest the reader think Felice's remarriage unduly hasty, consider his situation: though Adelaide, at fourteen, could no doubt help with the care of her two younger brothers, Felice could scarcely have managed without a wife and mother for his children. We do not know how Felice and his bride met, nor how well Giambattista and his sister knew their stepmother before they were thrown together. We may also wonder how difficult it was for Teresa, faced with the sudden responsibility of three children, one of them an infant. At the same time, as a widow, she may have considered herself fortunate to have found a well-established husband to support her.

By this time, according to Negri, Viotti had learned to play the violin, though "the poor boy had only the feeble and inexpert instruction that his father was able to give him." Fortunately, a traveling musician named "Signor Giovanni" (his surname was unknown to Negri), a very good lutenist, well grounded in music, turned up in Fontanetto and the local music lovers arranged for him to stay in the village and give lessons. The young Viotti flourished under his tutelage and after a little more than a year, when Signor Giovanni left to take up a position elsewhere, he was able to acquit himself in a "thoroughly praiseworthy

fashion.” All of this, Negri asserts, took place before 1764, which means that Giambattista, at the age of about nine,<sup>7</sup> was thrown back upon his own musical resources, and those of his father, for upward of three years—until late in 1766, when the first of the great upheavals in his life occurred.

To sum up Viotti’s musical background thus far: first, he would have heard music at home for as long as he could remember, indissolubly associated with the memory of his father gathering with his friends, of conversation, of music as a convivial experience. This circumstance goes some way toward explaining one of the mainsprings of Viotti’s behavior later in life, as we shall see. It would be interesting to know what sort of music Felice and his friends played (possibly with the participation of Signor Giovanni), and how expert their music making was. Presumably most or all of them belonged to the Fontanetto philharmonic society, which was good enough to have been invited to play in another town. Second, Giambattista had somehow learned to play the violin, with, as his instructors, only his father, an amateur horn player, and, for less than two years, a professional musician who was a lutenist! Third, if we are to believe another early biographer of Viotti’s,<sup>8</sup> Signor Giovanni, before taking leave of his pupil, had encouraged him to study music theory from the theoretical works of Carlo Giovanni Testori, probably *La musica ragionata espressa famigliarmente in dodici passeggiate a dialogo* (Music Theory Explained Informally in Twelve Dialogue-Walks). This manual is in the typical master-pupil catechistic form of many eighteenth-century didactic works. It was published in Vercelli in 1767, but may have been circulated in manuscript earlier, at least locally and among friends. It is just possible that a boy of Giambattista’s age could have understood this work, perhaps with some help from his father, especially since it is written in an accessible style, enlivened by anecdote, humor, and homely explanations. Viotti might well have learned the rudiments of music and the first elements of basso continuo composition from Testori’s theoretical works, if not as early as 1766, then in the 1770s.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, as we shall see, Viotti had learned to read music by 1766.

There is evidence that in these same years Giambattista’s general literacy was not being neglected. A register of the deliberations of the village council contains the following ordinance from the year 1763: “Decreed, the appointment of a public school teacher [*maestro di scuola pub.(lic)a*] in this locality for a three-year period, that is, beginning on the second of the coming month of November of the current year, and ending on the first of the same month of the year 1766.”<sup>10</sup> This ordinance bodes well for the young Viotti’s early general education, though we have no details, nor do we know the degree of his father’s literacy—or for that matter, his mother’s.

### ☞ “*Suonatore del Principe*” ☞

The next episode in Viotti’s life has all the elements of a fairy tale. As told by Negri, sometime in 1766, probably late in the year, Viotti was taken along to

Ivrea, a large town forty miles northwest of Fontanetto, or to the village of Strambino, near Ivrea—Negri is not sure which—to play in the “philharmonic society” of Fontanetto (nowadays we would call these groups village bands, though they often included stringed instruments), which had been invited there to play for a church feast-day service. “It was not easy,” Negri tells us, “to persuade the young Viotti’s father to undertake this trip, but he finally agreed, convinced that it would not cost him anything and that it was in his interest for his son to be put to the test and to become known.” The bishop of Ivrea, Monsignor Francesco Rorà, was present at the ceremony, and afterward the entire orchestra, including the eleven-year-old Viotti, went to play dinner music for Monsignor the Bishop. Negri, with a palpable sense of the importance of the event, writes:

From this moment we may say that Viotti’s fortune began, for that most worthy prelate, marveling at the grace with which the lad played his part, and charmed by his surpassing modesty and his pleasing appearance, told him in so many words that he could make his fortune for him if he was willing to go to Turin to a great house, where a young nobleman was looking for a companion with whom to study the violin. There was no need to return to Fontanetto to ask permission of his father, since the latter was at his side, so, thanking the bishop for his generous good offices, and after having been given a beautiful reliquary, they left immediately for Turin with letters of recommendation to the Marchesa [Marchioness] di Voghera.

Negri may be forgiven for exaggerating—Viotti and his father would not, indeed could not, have left for Turin that same day. At the very least they would have spent the night in Strambino or Ivrea before setting out on the daylong ride to the great capital of the kingdom of Sardinia. Nor does it seem likely that they would have gone without first returning to Fontanetto to gather the boy’s belongings and to say good-bye to his stepmother and sister and brother. On the other hand, though the roads of Piedmont were among the best in Europe, returning to Fontanetto would have entailed a considerable detour, and Felice may have decided not to lose any time.

We must now introduce two persons who, for the next several years, were to play such a decisive role in Viotti’s life and art: the Marchesa di Voghera (1723–1802) and her only son, Alfonso, Prince Dal Pozzo della Cisterna (1748–1819), the eighteen-year-old scion of one of the richest and most prominent families of Turin. It was on the marchesa’s behalf that Monsignor Rorà had interceded, and Alfonso for whom a musical companion was desired. The marchesa was forty-three years old when Viotti came to her, and had been widowed for twelve years. She had four daughters, the three eldest all married; the youngest, Maria Anna, was thirteen or fourteen years old (b. 7 December 1752), unmarried, and living in the Palazzo della Cisterna with her mother and brother.

We may imagine the scene when Felice Viotto and his son arrived at their door, dusty (or mud-spattered, more likely, in the Piedmont autumn or winter) and tired from their long ride, quite probably on horseback. (As the son of a blacksmith, Giambattista would have long since been at ease with horses, and, by the age of eleven, quite able to ride. There is ample evidence later in his life that he was an accomplished and enthusiastic horseman.) If indeed Felice and his son had departed immediately for Turin, the Marchesa di Voghera would have had no advance notice of their arrival. Nonetheless, according to Negri, she and the prince welcomed the young musician into their household immediately—we may surmise that Bishop Rorà's letters were persuasive. Other chroniclers<sup>11</sup> have embroidered upon this scene in the Palazzo della Cisterna: the prince, seeing the young Viotti for the first time, did not believe that he could be capable of anything, and was about to give him some money and send him home. At that moment Celoniat, the prince's violin teacher, walked in and persuaded the prince to listen to the boy play. A sonata by "Bezzusi"<sup>12</sup> was placed before him, which he played with impressive aplomb, saying in the Vercelli dialect, "ben par susi a le niente" (that was nothing). In an attempt to discomfit the eleven-year-old boy (!), they asked him to play a difficult sonata by Ferrari,<sup>13</sup> which he also played at sight with great energy (*con molta forza*). We may guess that Celoniat, or possibly Maria Anna, played the keyboard part for both works. Then, when Viotti admitted that he had never been to the theater, Celoniat took him along that evening to the opera house and placed him near his own chair in the orchestra, and Giambattista played through the entire opera at sight, to the amazement of the orchestra members. We are not told which opera it was, whether it was a performance or a rehearsal, or whether Viotti played the first or the second violin part. It would have been the first opera of the 1766–67 carnival season, F. G. Bertoni's *Tancredi*, the rehearsals for which began around mid-December, or possibly one of the autumn opere buffe—Guglielmi's *Il ratto della sposa* was given twenty-seven performances from 14 October to 26 November that year. Upon Viotti's return to the palace, the prince asked him what he had played at the opera, whereupon the boy played the overture from memory. It was, as F.-J. Fétis observes in his article on Viotti, "an explosion of talent."<sup>14</sup> It is this incident, more even than the one with Bishop Rorà, that testifies to the precociousness of Viotti's talent—that by the age of eleven he had achieved this level with such haphazard training. The prince was convinced, and the boy's destiny was ordained.

It was probably late in 1766, then, that this momentous event in Viotti's life occurred.<sup>15</sup> It was not unknown for musically talented boys from modest families to be "adopted" by wealthy benefactors, and since Fontanetto Po was scarcely more than a day's ride away, it was perhaps not considered an especially disruptive step for a boy of his age—something akin to going to a boarding school nowadays. But we must not forget that Giambattista had lost his mother not four years earlier. We can only imagine how traumatic this had been, and to

what extent his stepmother had succeeded in healing the wound. We shall see that, later in life, Viotti suffered from the anguish of separation from loved ones to an extraordinary degree, amounting almost to an obsession.

Giovanni Battista, in an autobiographical note (“Précis”) that he wrote thirty-two years later,<sup>16</sup> remembered that his family had “intended another way of life for me, [but] in spite of them I chose the musical profession.” This assertion is perfectly reconcilable with the report of Felice’s initial reluctance to allow his son to go on the trip with the Fontanetto philharmonic society. The blacksmith, now in his fifties, may well have wished for his eldest son to join him at the forge and eventually to take his place—it was the natural way of things. But whatever doubts he had were presumably dispelled by his glimpse of the world his son was about to enter. He spent ten or twelve days in Turin, no doubt as a guest in the Palazzo della Cisterna, before bidding his son good-bye and returning to Fontanetto.

What was this world to which the eleven-year-old Giambattista had been delivered? First of all, the city of Turin, with a population of a little over 50,000, was the capital of the kingdom of Sardinia, which included not only the Piedmont region in the northwestern corner of Italy but also, on the other side of the Alps, a considerable portion of present-day France, the Savoy region. The house of Savoy had provided the rulers of the region since the eleventh century. Charles Emmanuel III, a vigorous soldier king, had been on the throne since 1730, to be succeeded in 1773 by his mediocre son Victor Amadeus III (reigned 1773–96). The origins of the house of Savoy were French, and French remained the official language of the court long after Turin replaced Chambéry as the capital in the sixteenth century, indeed well into Viotti’s time. However, as one English traveler put it, “The Torinese in general speak French indifferently, and amongst themselves converse constantly in Piedmontese, which is [...] a wretched jargon.”<sup>17</sup>

Turin, on the upper Po, was the first important town in Italy reached by visitors from France by way of the Mount Cenis Pass. Its strict rectilinear plan, so different from the narrow winding streets of other Italian towns, seemed to be reflected in its atmosphere—sober, orderly, slightly dull. That at least was how many British travelers on the Grand Tour described Turin. The court was thought to be the “politest in Europe.”<sup>18</sup> For about two months, from late December to February, the carnival festivities and entertainments enlivened the city for visitors as well as its inhabitants. Charles Burney, who visited Turin in July 1770, thought that “there is now a gloomy sameness at this court, in the daily repetition of state parade and prayers, which renders Turin a dull residence to strangers, except during the carnival.”<sup>19</sup>

As for the more intimate world of the Palazzo della Cisterna, we may count ourselves fortunate. From 1761 until 1768, when he attained his majority, the prince Alfonso was placed under his mother’s guardianship and his patrimony under her administration, for which detailed accounts were kept. These account

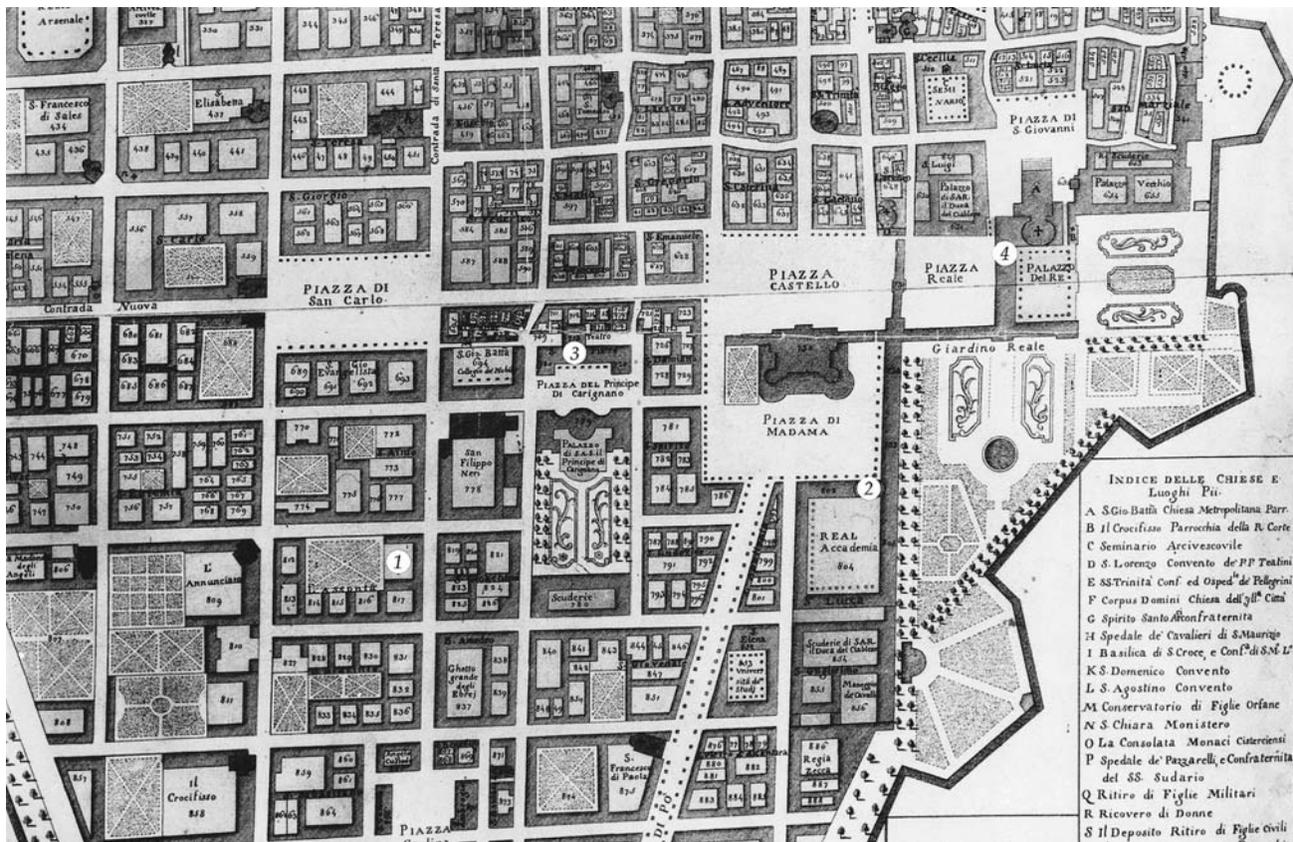
registers, six in number,<sup>20</sup> and other documents housed in the Archivio di Stato in Biella, Italy, afford us a precious glimpse into the daily workings of a princely Italian household of the *ancien régime*.

The Palazzo della Cisterna<sup>21</sup> was about a five-minute walk from the royal palace (Palazzo Reale), with its chapel, and from the Teatro Regio, the famous opera theater of Turin (see figure 1.1). As we shall see, these two institutions loomed large in the lives of both the prince and Viotti. In the 1760s and 1770s the Marchesa di Voghera and her children were attended by a retinue of twenty-five to thirty persons: the prince's tutor, a "medico di casa," a secretary, a majordomo, and kitchen, domestic, and stables staff.

The prince, besides the instruction of his regular tutor (whose yearly salary of 360 lire [L.360] included "offerings for the Masses"), enjoyed an array of lessons in special subjects. The registers show payments of varying regularity throughout this period to *maestri* of writing (*piuma francese*), dancing, drawing, fencing, horsemanship, German, and violin.<sup>22</sup> Dancing and writing lessons were given to the prince's sisters as well, but as the eldest were married off from 1762 to 1765 these payments decreased correspondingly, leaving only Maria Anna, who also received harpsichord lessons. The fee was the same (L.16 for a month's lessons) for all the *maestri* except for the writing instructor (L.24) and the German instructor (L.20).

The household boasted two harpsichords, the cost (L.250) of a new one with two registers "for the use of the children" having been entered on 1 January 1762;<sup>23</sup> semiannual payments were made for tuning and maintenance. There are occasional payments for music copying and binding, and on 18 April 1763 and 21 February and 30 October 1767, "suonatore venuti ad un concerto in casa" (players come to the house for a concert) were paid L.24, L.84, and L.24, respectively. (Players were usually paid 5–10 lire for accompanying balls at court. Assuming a comparable fee for a private concert, we may conjecture that these concerts involved approximately three or four and ten or twelve paid musicians, respectively.) There are also yearly payments for seating rental (*fitto palchetti*, L.100–150) at the Teatro Regio, two permanent tickets (*biglietti perpetui*, L.39 each) for the opera season, one for the marchesa, one for the prince, and numerous tickets for individual opera performances for the marchesa, her daughters, palace dependents (e.g., servants, and the secretary's two daughters) and, very often, for the prince, usually with his tutor or his friends (*per il Sigr. Principe e sua compagnia*), for as many as eight or ten performances of the two carnival operas, reminding us that in Turin, as elsewhere, going to the opera was a social as much as an aesthetic occasion.

We must now try to picture Viotti, a boy of eleven, a small-town blacksmith's son, entering this household. Our first glimpse of his presence in the palace comes with an entry of 29 April 1767 in one of the account registers, under the rubric Expenses: Clothing: "to the merchants Gajotti and Ferraris for cloth and muslin for a gift, namely for the wardrobe of the little musician [*piccolo suonatore*]



INDICE DELLE CHIESE E Luoghi Pii

- A S. Gio. Batt. Chiesa Metropolitana Parr.
- B Il Crocifisso Parrocchia della R. Corte
- C Seminario Arcivescovile
- D S. Lorenzo Convento de PP. Teatini
- E S. Trinità Conf. ed Osped. de Pellegrini
- F Corpus Domini Chiesa dell'ill. Cam.
- G Spirito Santo Arcifraternita
- H Spedale de Cavalieri di S. Maurizio
- I Basilica di S. Croce, e Confr. di S. M. L.
- K S. Domenico Convento
- L S. Agostino Convento
- M Conservatorio di Figlie Orfane
- N S. Chiara Monistero
- O La Consolata Monaci Cisterciensi
- P Spedale de Pizzarelli, e Confraternita del SS. Sudario
- Q Ritiro di Figlie Militari
- R Ricovero di Donne
- S Il Deposito Ritiro di Figlie Civili

living in the home of His Excellency—L.19.”<sup>24</sup> The secretary seems unsure of Viotti’s name—an indication, perhaps, of how recently the boy had arrived.

There are four other similar entries for “il suonatore Viotto” in the clothing expenses section, all in 1768: for muslin for cuffs—L.3; for three handkerchiefs—L.3.2 (3 lire and 2 soldi, there being 20 soldi in the Piedmontese lira); for muslin for a shirt—L.2.10; and, on 1 July, “for an apron for the suonatore Viotto’s mother, ordered by the Prince”—L.4.5. (This, as we know, was Viotti’s step-mother, Teresa Maria.) Do we detect the hand of the marchesa behind this heartwarming gesture of the apron?

By the time of Viotti’s arrival in the Palazzo della Cisterna, the prince had been studying the violin for more than five years. His teacher, Signor Celoniat, “suonatore di violino,” was also paid L.6 per pupil per month to accompany the dancing lessons of the prince and his sisters. Viotti first appears as a pupil with the entry for 1 August 1767: “to Signor Celoniat, violin player, for violin lessons to the Prince and to Vioto, the Esteemed Prince’s musician [*suonatore del V(enerat) o Principe*], including various commissions of copying of sonatas, as noted and received—80.10.”<sup>25</sup> This figure probably indicates two months of lessons at L.16 per month per pupil (= L.64) plus L.16.10 paid to Celoniat for music copying, the unusually high figure for copying perhaps reflecting the need for new “suonate” for the newly arrived pupil, now twelve years old. We may therefore assume that Viotti began lessons with Celoniat sometime around early June 1767.

If Viotti did arrive in the palace in 1766, it is not clear why he did not begin lessons until the following June. In any case, the prince did not have violin lessons during the first five months of 1767, though he did have lessons in other subjects, and Celoniat continued to accompany the dance lessons. Inexplicably, from this first entry in August until early in 1768 Viotti’s name does not appear, though the prince continues his lessons regularly. Viotti resumed lessons in January 1768 and continued more or less regularly, the last entry, on 30 July, showing L.56 for one month’s lessons for the two pupils plus two bows and strings. On his twentieth birthday, 8 October 1768, the prince came into his inheritance and the account registers kept for his mother were discontinued. Giambattista, then, took about twenty-four weekly lessons from Celoniat, from early June 1767 through July 1768, with a five-month hiatus August–December 1767. Though we have no record, he probably continued with Celoniat until he began having lessons from Gaetano Pugnani in late 1769 or 1770.

The phrase “suonatore del Principe” is not to be understood as someone whose function it was to play for the prince but as a musician under the prince’s

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*Figure 1.1. (opposite)* Adaption of a detail of an “Explanatory map of Turin with numbers indicating all the owners of houses, identification of the churches with numbers and descriptions of the quarters, squares and principal places in 1796” (Turin, Biblioteca Reale; Incisione IV 70; by permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali; further reproduction prohibited). Key: 1, Palazzo Cisterna; 2, Teatro Regio; 3, Teatro Carignano; 4, Palazzo Reale and the Cathedral of San Giovanni, with the Chapel of the Holy Shroud.

“protection” or patronage. We may well suppose, however, that Viotti would have been expected to play an occasional sonata with Maria Anna, indeed that he would have been happy to, that he and the prince would have played duets together, and that he would have participated in house concerts such as the ones given in February and October 1767.

None of the entries for Celoniat gives his first name or even an initial, which means that we cannot be certain of his identity. In the late 1760s there were at least six violinist-members of the Celoniat family active in Turin.<sup>26</sup> Taking into account age and position in the musical establishment of the court, the choice as to which Celoniat it was narrows down to three: Ignazio, his cousin Carlo Lorenzo, and the latter’s brother, Carlo Antonio. All three were members of the first violin section of the Teatro Regio orchestra, though Carlo Antonio only from 1771. In the orchestra of the Royal Chapel Carlo Lorenzo was in the first violin section, the other two in the seconds. Ignazio had perhaps the widest reputation of the three, having composed two operas for the Teatro Regio, and he was often given the task of directing the orchestra for the carnival balls and extra concerts. On the other hand, Carlo Lorenzo was consistently placed ahead of him in the two orchestras; he had several published compositions to his name, and it was he who, on Ignazio’s death in 1785, replaced him in the important task of accompanying the royal family’s dancing lessons. Carlo Antonio does not seem to have distinguished himself particularly. We must content ourselves with knowing only that Viotti’s first proper violin teacher was one of these three men.<sup>27</sup>

It is regrettable that the complete registers for the years after 1768 have not survived. They would have told us much about the eighteen years during which, it now seems, Viotti enjoyed the prince’s protection:<sup>28</sup> precisely when he began lessons with Pugnani, for example, and what fee Pugnani was paid (to judge by their respective salaries at court it would have been much higher than Celoniat’s); details about Viotti’s education, both musical (was he given lessons in composition by Pugnani? What about keyboard lessons?) and extramusical; and for how long Viotti remained resident in the Palazzo della Cisterna. Further, it is commonly thought that Viotti was influential in introducing Stradivari violins to Paris in the early 1780s. Though violins by Stradivari did not yet command the price that they would at the time of Viotti’s death in 1824 (he mentions his instrument in his will), it seems unlikely that he could have afforded one in the 1770s without the prince’s help. This purchase would certainly have been entered in the accounts.

It is difficult to know what Viotti’s position was in the household hierarchy. The evidence is scarce and somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, we have a rather startling document in the Biella archive,<sup>29</sup> which raises difficult questions. It is a hastily written, undated memorandum, probably for the palace secretary, or possibly for the marchioness or the prince:

Money to be allocated each month to the servants of His Excellency the Prince della Cisterna for bread and wine

To the manservant SanGermano	L.11.5.—
To the suonatore Viotto, and for him to the said manservant who serves him bread and wine	8.15.—
To the footman Flambon	11.5.—
To the cook	15.—
To the scullion including his salary, bread, and wine	12.10.—
To the coachman	15.—
To the groom	15.—
To the valet	15.—

The memorandum goes on to other categories of expenditure. This list appears to identify, for accounting purposes, those servants assigned specifically to the service of the prince, as distinct from the marchesa's servants and the rest of the staff. The spelling "Viotto" points to an early date for this memorandum, certainly before 1772, by which time "Viotti" had been settled upon, as does the relatively small expenditure for Viotti, who, as a boy, would have consumed less wine, if not less bread than the others. The inclusion of Viotti's name with the prince's servants may simply represent a bookkeeping convenience, there being no existing register category for him. He may well have eaten with the servants, at least at this early stage, almost certainly not at the prince's table, the provision for which is considered separately in the accounts. Similarly, we cannot tell from the existing eighteenth-century architectural plans whether Viotti was lodged on the *piano nobile* of the palace, where the marchesa and the prince had their apartments, or on the floor above, where the servants lived.

All of this suggests that Viotti's status was something less than that of a family member, as does the paucity of clothing purchases and the absence of other expenditures in his name in the accounts, in contrast to the abundant, often very expensive clothing purchases and other outlays for the family members, for example, pocket money, hairdressing costs, tips to coachmen, and the like.<sup>30</sup> More significant still is the fact that he is not shown as receiving lessons from the tutor or from the teachers of subjects other than the violin, at least as of October 1768.

On the other hand, we have Negri's assurance that Viotti was assigned "courtous servants," that he was looked upon as a son in the family, that he was "entrusted to Mr. D. Eno, formerly the tutor of the little Marquis,"<sup>31</sup> that "there were no endearments that the little Marquis did not bestow upon him," and that "such was the care taken of Viotti by that family that for all his youthful years he never came to his native town without being accompanied by a servant."

The truth is perhaps more subtle than either of these two apparently contradictory descriptions would suggest. Giambattista was probably given every material comfort he could have wished for, more in fact than he could possibly have been used to. It is clear from the memorandum just cited that there was at least one servant assigned to him, to serve him his bread and wine. He was given every opportunity to learn and to improve as a musician, he enjoyed the

hospitality and even the affection of his benefactors, but he was not, could not be considered or treated as a member of a princely family of the *ancien régime*. The Biella archives, interesting though they are, do not give us a more precise picture than this.

For the prince, violin lessons were a part of his grooming as a courtier in the Castiglian mould. As early as 1771, he became a Gentleman of the Table (*gentiluomo di bocca*) and second equerry to the king—the beginning of a distinguished court and cavalry career. For the blacksmith's son from Fontanetto Po, the violin lessons were something else altogether. Whatever his position in the household, it was the marchesa and her son who enabled Viotti to participate, through Pugnani, in the great tradition of Italian violin playing stemming from Corelli.

We have one other glimpse into Giambattista's life in the Palazzo della Cisterna. "The students from Fontanetto who were in Turin," says Negri, "on the insistence of that most amicable gentleman [the prince Alfonso], often went to visit their townsman." Giambattista's friends would have been suitably impressed by his good fortune, by the unaccustomed luxury of his surroundings, and surely their companionship would have assuaged the loneliness or homesickness he may have felt in his new situation.

In the meantime, for Felice Viotto and his new wife, Teresa Maria, another cycle of births, and, implacably, deaths, had begun. Their firstborn, named Francesca Maddalena, no doubt in memory of Felice's recently deceased first wife, was born 24 August 1764, and survived into adulthood. On 10 February 1767, the eleven-year-old Giambattista stood witness for the baptism of the second, another girl, Domenica Appolonia, who probably did not survive infancy.<sup>32</sup> We may speculate that he had been informed of the impending birth by a messenger from Fontanetto, and that he would have ridden posthaste, accompanied by a servant, on horseback, or in a coach provided by the marchesa. He would then have returned to the Palazzo della Cisterna in time to hear or to participate in the house concert of 21 February.

On 17 November 1767, Giambattista's older sister, Adelaide, married one Giovan Battista Carbonero, a widower from the town of Montiglio. Felice provided her with a dowry.<sup>33</sup> Naturally, the young suonatore del Principe would have attended the wedding in Fontanetto, though it is possible that he had gone to London, as we shall see shortly. As to Giambattista's younger brother, Giuseppe, Negri informs us that he too had a bent for the violin, but he was so scatterbrained that Giambattista, "who with the blessing of his patrons had taken his brother Giuseppe under his wing to teach him, in the end was forced to send him away as incorrigible."

We saw that Giambattista had violin lessons with Celoniat until at least the end of July 1768; we may assume that he continued with Celoniat until his musical education was taken in hand by Gaetano Pugnani, who became Viotti's principal teacher, and who was by far the most important influence on his early musical development.

☞ “Pupil of the Celebrated Pugnani” ☞

Gaetano Pugnani (1731–98) was the leading light of the musical establishment of Turin, which was centered around the court, and of which the two chief institutions were the Royal Chapel and the Teatro Regio, each with its complement of singers and instrumentalists. Pugnani had been a pupil of Giovanni Battista Somis’s (1686–1763), who, in turn, had studied for three years (1703–6) in Rome with Arcangelo Corelli. Founder of the Piedmontese school of violin playing, Somis had raised the level of the Chapel and Teatro orchestras to an international standard. Pugnani had played in both orchestras since boyhood, and his position as Somis’s eventual successor, the leading representative, with Giardini,<sup>34</sup> of the Piedmontese school, was never in doubt. He became leader of the Teatro orchestra in the 1757–58 season (more than five years before Somis’s death), of the Chapel orchestra in 1770.<sup>35</sup> Already he had performed one of his own concertos in 1754 in Paris at the Concert spirituel, to universal acclaim. His international reputation was enhanced by his numerous published compositions: orchestral and chamber works, violin sonatas, and, beginning in London in 1769, operas.

One early biographer, Edme-François Miel, who is generally reliable, asserts that Viotti went to London with Pugnani at the age of twelve,<sup>36</sup> which would provide a plausible explanation for the otherwise unmotivated hiatus in Giambattista’s lessons with Celoniat in August–December 1767. Pugnani had indeed gone to London in 1767, where he arrived probably in the second week of October, but there is no evidence that Viotti accompanied him.<sup>37</sup> If he had, it would have meant, of course, that, by the beginning of 1768, the twelve-year-old Giambattista traveled back to Italy alone, or at any rate without Pugnani, who stayed in England, performing on the violin (he was a favorite at the musical parties of the Harris family in Salisbury),<sup>38</sup> particularly as an orchestra leader, and producing his opera buffa, *Nanetta e Lubino*, at the King’s Theatre, London, the first performance of which took place on 8 April 1769. After leading the orchestra in concerts for the Salisbury Music Festival in August (when his portrait, shown in figure 1.2, was probably done), he returned to Turin in time to lead the orchestra of the Teatro Regio for the first carnival opera, the rehearsals for which began in mid-December. He probably took Viotti on as a pupil not long after returning to Turin, that is, late in 1769 or in 1770.

We can only speculate as to the specifics of Viotti’s lessons under Pugnani—in his *Précis* of 1798, already referred to, he says that he passed his childhood in “heedless play [*étourderies*] and endless study.” We know that Viotti, later in life, placed paramount importance on the practicing of scales for the young violinist: “It is [the scale] that creates good intonation, a beautiful tone, that makes [...] the fingers supple [...], that gradually gives us confidence, helps us over obstacles.” Viotti also asserts that he hardly ever practiced a passage from a



Figure 1.2. Crayon and chalk drawing of Pugnani by Coplestone Warre Bamphylde, 1769 (Hampshire Record Office; 9M73/G1009).

piece of music, but that he “never ceased” to practice scales, and that if he ever could play a scale perfectly, he would consider himself the first violinist in the world.<sup>39</sup> He then lists seven ways in which the scale is to be practiced:

- 1) without inflections [...], the sound of each note should be begun, continued, and terminated at the same level of loudness
- 2) beginning *forte* and finishing *piano*
- 3) beginning *piano*, *crescendo* and *diminuendo*
- 4) the scale in a given key, but played in every possible position
- 5) in semitones [chromatic scale], with the same inflections as above
- 6) with a trill on each note, same inflections
- 7) finally, practice all of this in the different keys, in different positions, and at different speeds

We may permit ourselves the assumption that Viotti, in enunciating these principles and methods, was speaking from his own experience as a pupil, that, at least to an extent, they had been part of his own violinistic formation. All the more so when we consider Viotti’s last, very revealing observation regarding

scales: “That which lays the firmest foundation [*raffermit*] and which does the most good is the practicing of extremely long and sustained tones—it is those that sometimes vex me.”<sup>40</sup>

Viotti’s violinistic patrimony, the Piedmontese school, was celebrated above all for its broad bowing technique—its tone production. G. B. Somis, his teacher’s teacher, “was famed for possessing ‘the most majestic bow stroke in Europe,’” and Pugnani’s “‘arco magno’ (grand bowing) became proverbial.”<sup>41</sup> It is more than likely, therefore, that Pugnani would have devoted a good part of his lesson time with Giambattista on long, sustained bow strokes, and scales are the most convenient, though not the only, and perhaps not the most interesting way of practicing such a technique. At all events, it was precisely a broad, powerful tone which was to become the hallmark of Viotti’s playing and of the “Viotti school.”

As for other technical training, it is easy to forget that all of the staples of the young violinist of today, the studies of Kreutzer, Rode, Fiorillo, Gaviniès, and the myriad others coming afterward, lay very much in the future when Viotti was studying with Pugnani. *L’arte del arco*, attributed to Giuseppe Tartini, had been published in Paris in 1758, and Tartini’s *Letter* [...] to *Signora Maddalena Lombardini* was published in Venice in 1770, though it had been written in 1760. It seems reasonable to suppose that Pugnani would have been aware of these works, both of which stressed mastery of the bow. The *Letter*, however, reveals a fundamental difference between the Tartini and the Piedmontese schools: Tartini is at pains to stress lightness of bowing—literally lightness of wrist (*leggerezza di polso*), so as to avoid harshness or rawness—and flexibility and agility of the bow arm. There is no hint of the desirability of a broad, powerful tone. Several years later, an attempt was made, probably by Baillet, to distinguish the different characters possible on the violin: “simple and melodious under Corelli’s fingers; harmonious, touching, and graceful under Tartini’s bow; pleasing and suave under Gaviniès’s; noble and grandiose under Pugnani’s; full of fire, full of audacity, pathetic, sublime in Viotti’s hands.” Still later, Baillet, in his *L’Art du violon* (1835), wrote, “The sound that Tartini and Pugnani drew from their violins is remembered well enough to compare the differences and evoke the kind of expression which characterized their playing.”<sup>42</sup> Giambattista had no doubt been taken to hear the concert of the celebrated Signora Lombardini-Sirmen (her violinist-husband was named Lodovico Sirmen) at the Teatro Carignano on 3 June 1768. She was a pupil of Tartini, and according to the *maestro di cappella* of the Turin cathedral, she “won the admiration of all Turin with her violin playing” and she “performs [Tartini’s] sonatas with such perfection that she proves herself to be his true and worthy descendant.”<sup>43</sup>

Pugnani and his gifted pupil did not have at their disposal the graded system of technical study that was to come. All the more reason, then, to suppose that scales may well have formed the backbone of Viotti’s early technical grounding. As for pieces, it seems likely that the sonatas of Corelli would have been part of Giambattista’s student repertory, as well as the sonatas and concertos of

G. B. Somis and Pugnani, and, surely, the sonatas of Besozzi and Domenico Ferrari, two of which, as we have seen, had been Viotti's triumphant *pièces d'entrée*. Indeed, Miel asserts that "in old music, Viotti prized particularly the sonatas of Ferrari, classics for the violin, and in which he was most practiced."<sup>44</sup>

In the second half of January 1771, Leopold Mozart and his son visited Turin for two weeks. Leopold, as was his habit, made an entry in his travel diary consisting of a list of twenty or so names of persons they had met, mostly members of the Turinese nobility and musical luminaries of the court.<sup>45</sup> It is the only known record of their sojourn in the capital of the kingdom of Sardinia; there are no relevant newspaper reports, diary entries, or documents in the archives of the Teatro Regio,<sup>46</sup> where Wolfgang and his father surely heard a performance of Giovanni Paisiello's *Annibale in Torino*,<sup>47</sup> conducted by the composer, whose name is among those on Leopold's list.

Among the other names Leopold recorded were the Marchesa di Voghera, Pugnani, and Celoniat.<sup>48</sup> He does not mention Viotti. We are thus denied an irresistibly attractive scenario of the two fifteen-year-olds (Wolfgang celebrated his birthday in Turin), brought together by the marchesa or by Pugnani, perhaps even in the Palazzo della Cisterna—the marchesa and her son would have had more reason than almost anyone else in Turin to welcome the Mozarts into their home for an informal *accademia*<sup>49</sup>—of the two gifted boys taking to each other, of Giovan Battista perhaps accompanying Wolfgang in a sonata (the honored guest would have been given the newer harpsichord, of course), or even, to amuse themselves, of their improvising something together. . . . No, Leopold does not mention Viotti. That a memorable occasion was missed may be judged from Leopold's warm account of his son's meetings, only eight months earlier, in Florence, with the English violin prodigy, Thomas Linley, who also was Wolfgang's contemporary. Leopold wrote that "the two boys performed one after the other throughout the whole evening, constantly embracing each other. On the following day the little Englishman, a most charming boy, had his violin brought to our rooms and played the whole afternoon, Wolfgang accompanying him on his own."<sup>50</sup>

For about ten months, from October 1772 through July 1773, Pugnani was again away in London. Experienced teacher that he was, he would have left the seventeen-year-old Giambattista with a plan of study and repertory to cover, perhaps under the supervision of Celoniat. On the other hand, it is just possible that Viotti accompanied Pugnani on this trip—we shall return to this point shortly.

### ☞ *Theater Musician* ☞

In 1773 Viotti entered the orchestra of the Teatro Regio. Founded in 1738, the Teatro Regio had a reputation as one of the finest opera houses of Europe.<sup>51</sup> Its

activities, as well as those of all the other theaters of the city, were controlled by a group of forty noblemen, the Nobile Società dei Cavalieri, which received an annual royal subsidy. The orchestra was comparable in size to the orchestras of other important European opera houses of the time, such as those of Naples and Paris, having about sixty players, with about twenty-eight violins. The main opera season, apart from productions for special occasions, took place during carnival and consisted of two serious operas (*opere serie*), one in late December–January, the other in January–February, each having a run of about twenty to twenty-five performances. There was, in addition, an autumn season of opera buffa in the smaller theater of Prince Carignano. A French *opéra comique* company would occasionally visit, and a season of French and Italian plays was held during the spring and summer.

This, so far as we know, was Viotti's first salaried position. But it must be doubted that it was the first time Viotti had sat in the midst of this orchestra. We may surmise that, in the years before he himself joined the orchestra, Viotti would have profited from the musicians' practice, sometimes abused, of bringing nonplaying persons into the orchestra. The orchestra contracts for the 1760s and 1770s often have the following clause:

None of the undersigned virtuosi may, for any reason whatsoever, introduce into the orchestra during the Operas and particularly the Ballets any person or persons who, with their whispering, cause a disturbance and a hindrance to the virtuosi in their playing; and for this inconvenience, and other particular reasons, it is not permitted to introduce them without authorization.<sup>52</sup>

Pugnani, we may be sure, would have obtained authorization for his prize pupil, secure in the knowledge that Giambattista was there to watch and to listen, not to whisper.

The architectural plans of the Teatro Regio, a separate page for each level of the building, are given pride of place in the volume on theaters in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* of 1751–72.<sup>53</sup> They repay careful study. In the plan showing the second rank of boxes is indicated the gallery "through which the court passes from the royal palace to the spectacle." The king and his entourage could indeed reach the royal box directly through a series of rooms and corridors from the royal apartments. There is every reason to believe that the royal family took more than a merely official interest in the opera. On 4 January 1772, the Duke of Savoy, the future King Victor Amadeus III, wrote rather grumpily to his daughter, Josephine, the Comtesse de Provence, in Versailles:

The opera is going along nicely, but as far as music is concerned great factions have arisen because of bad blood between Pugnani and the music director, Aprile, the leading man, and Guierini [Lucrezia Agujari], the leading woman. This last gets the approval of the

groundlings and of us other ignoramuses, for whom, however, it makes no difference; but never mind—our side is the strongest.<sup>54</sup>

It is interesting that these conflicts reached the ear of the duke, and that they were still unresolved during the performances (Colla's *Andromeda* had been premiered on 26 December).

The Teatro Regio boasted a unique acoustical feature. Beneath the floor of the orchestra, there was a concave, basin-like space, a kind of resonating chamber, the purpose of which was to “augment the sound of the instruments considerably.”<sup>55</sup> One of the cross-sectional plans in the *Encyclopédie* shows this quite clearly, labeled “Orchestra with a void beneath.”<sup>56</sup> One visitor reported that two tubes led the sound from the ends of this chamber to the interior of the theater.<sup>57</sup> It is odd that there seem to be no firsthand reports of the efficacy of this early acoustical experiment. Burney, who says he was “carried into every part” of the Teatro, seems not to have been shown it, else he surely would have mentioned it, nor did he hear a performance in the theater.

The *Encyclopédie* plans afford us a glimpse into the working lives of an eighteenth-century theater musician. On the fourth level, behind and above the stage, is shown the musicians' dressing room—not a very large one considering the size of the orchestra. A few minutes before each performance (which began at 5:30 P.M. when the court was present, otherwise at 6:15 P.M.), Viotti and his colleagues, powdered and bewigged, instruments in hand (excepting the double bassists, who surely had storage space for their instruments nearer the orchestra “pit”), descended the four flights of stairs to a point beneath the upstage area, from where they proceeded to a set of stairs leading up to their places in front of the stage.<sup>58</sup> The dancers' dressing rooms (considerably more of them than for the musicians!) were similarly situated, with access to the same stairs.

Viotti's position was third chair of the second violins, which in Francesco Galeazzi's orchestra plan of 1791<sup>59</sup> (see figure 1.3) would place him quite near the watchful eye and the authoritative bow of Pugnani, the first violinist and *direttore dell'orchestra*. (In 1770, a week after being appointed first violinist of the Chapel and Chamber [Cappella e Camera], Pugnani had threatened to quit his post as leader of the theater orchestra unless he was given a raise in salary. The theater administrators immediately acquiesced.)<sup>60</sup>

After the orchestra had carefully tuned—the musicians' contracts of this period are explicit on this point<sup>61</sup>—the performance began. We have an eyewitness report:

[Pugnani] dominates the orchestra masterfully, like a stalwart general in the midst of his troops. Animated by the all-consuming fire of his talent, and intent upon his chief objective which is unity [of ensemble], he subjects, sometimes by a glance, sometimes by a signal, all the members of the orchestra to his every wish. His bow is the commander's baton, which everyone obeys with utmost precision. With a single bow

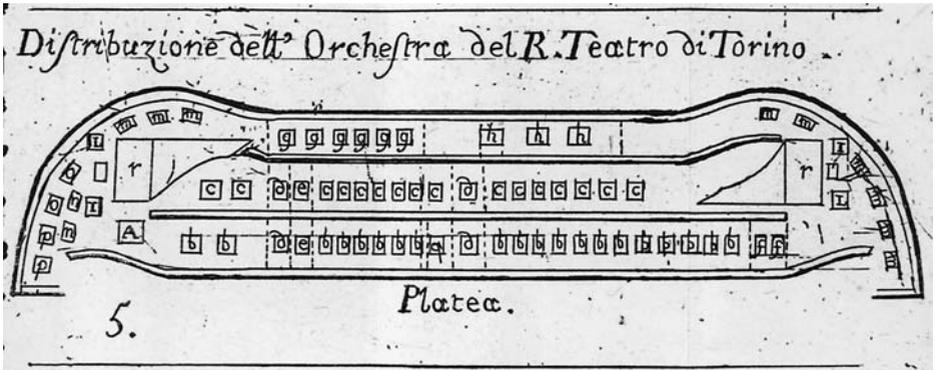


Figure 1.3. Seating plan of the orchestra of the Teatro Regio, ca. 1791, from Francesco Galeazzi, *Elementi teorico-pratici di musica con un saggio sopra l'arte di suonare il violino* (Turin, 1791–96). Key: A, the orchestra director (Pugnani), raised above the others; b, first violins; c, second violins; d, oboes; e, clarinets; f, horns; g, violas; h, bassoons; I, first cellos; L, first double basses; m, basses (that is, cellos and double basses); n, other horns; o, timpani; p, trumpets; q, first violinist for the ballets; r, harpsichords. Viotti's position was third chair in the second violins. (By permission of the British Library; 1423.h.5.)

stroke, given at the right moment, he invigorates the orchestra, slows it down, or speeds it up at will; he indicates the subtlest of nuances to the singers, and brings [*rappelle*] everyone to that perfect unity which is the soul of a performance. Such is his musical preparedness that he is a master accompanist, just as he is in the conducting of a symphony. Imbued with what should be the chief object of every skilful accompanist, which is to support and bring out the essential parts, he never takes his eyes off the singers except for a quick glance at the music; with his remarkable intelligence he grasps so quickly and so profoundly [*vivement*] the harmony, the character, the tempo and the style [of the music], that he simultaneously stamps its imprint in the souls of the singers and of each member of the orchestra.<sup>62</sup>

With all due allowance for Rangoni's perfervid prose, this remains an impressive testimonial to Pugnani's qualities. In the late eighteenth century, the modern method of conducting an orchestra with a baton had not yet come into general use in Italy. Usually the first violinist led the orchestra from his chair, sometimes using his bow as a baton. In operas he shared the leadership with one or more harpsichord players, a situation that, as we have seen, sometimes created confusion or conflict, particularly when a dominating personality, such as Pugnani, was involved.

The Galeazzi plan shows the second violins seated in a row with their backs to the stage. As any opera orchestra musician knows, it can be frustrating not to be able to see the action and the spectacle, except by craning one's neck around

for an occasional hasty glimpse, though by the same token there is less distraction. At any rate, there would have been distraction enough provided by the audience. Viotti, if he wished, could have looked up, during rests in the second violin part, or while playing undemanding passages, and discerned in the candlelight the royal family in their central box in the second tier, for example, or the Prince Dal Pozzo della Cisterna, with his friends, in his box.

Present-day opera house employees will be interested to know that refreshments were provided by the administration for the singers and dancers, but not the orchestra members, at the dress rehearsals and all the performances. The caterer's contract stipulated that each singer was to receive four "rinfreschi" (sweets and a drink), the prompter, two; the male dancers received a half-pint of wine and bread, the female dancers a quarter pint and bread, "all of it to be of the best quality."<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, safety standards were perhaps not as stringent as nowadays. Backstage employees were most at risk, especially from falling objects, but the orchestra members were also occasionally injured. In 1782 a member of the first violin section had his leg broken by a falling beam; whether or not he was at his post at the time is not revealed. Instruments were frequently damaged, sometimes during rehearsals. The theater administration duly compensated the victims of these accidents. In the 1766–67 season Gaetano Chiabrano was awarded L.189.6.8 for his broken cello, "because of the ballerino Armano having fallen into the orchestra." There is no mention of damage to Armano.<sup>64</sup>

Below is the rehearsal schedule<sup>65</sup> for the first opera of the 1773–74 carnival season in the Teatro Regio, J. Myslivecek's *Antigona*:

December	15	staging
	16, 17, 18, 19, 20	music
	21, 22	music and costumes
	23	dress rehearsal
	24	ballet dress rehearsal

The sixteenth, then, was the date of the eighteen-year-old Viotti's first experience in an orchestra of even remotely the size and quality of this one, in fact, in one of the great orchestras of Europe.<sup>66</sup> The first of twenty performances was on the twenty-sixth.

In January 1774 the son of Victor Amadeus III, Carlo Emanuel, the Prince of Piedmont, and his sister, the princess Marianne, wrote to their two sisters, married to the brothers of Louis XVI of France.<sup>67</sup> The prince to the Comtesse d'Artois: "The opera isn't very good. [Elisabetta] Taiber sings well, the leading man also [...] either Marianne or I will send you the libretto." Princess Marianne to the Comtesse de Provence: "They say that the second opera will be better [...] Razet will take the place of Martini, who is unable to dance because he is so old." Viotti could not have helped noticing from the audience's reaction, which was vociferous enough to come to the notice of the board of directors,

that “the public was not pleased with the Ballerino Martini” in the first opera. The poor man was duly replaced in the second opera, as the princess Marianne had foretold, by one Rasetti, who presumably was younger.<sup>68</sup>

On 15 January the prince writes, “A week from today the second opera begins, called the Defeat of Darius. [...] How many camels, elephants, horses and asses will there be?” The prince was only half joking—he knew his ancient Greek history, but he also knew the Teatro Regio, renowned as it was for the lavishness of its productions, in which animals often played no small part. The plan of the ground floor of the theater in the *Encyclopédie* shows a monumentally large stair-ramp in one corner, beneath the stage, duly labeled “Ramp for bringing horses up to the stage.”

The rehearsal schedule<sup>69</sup> for the second opera, G. Masi’s *La Disfatta di Dario*, was recorded in greater detail, giving us some idea of what was in store for Viotti and his colleagues:

January	14	extras and grooms at 3 o’clock after lunch and music rehearsal at 5:30 with extras
	18	extras as above. In the evening music rehearsal, and ballet in the Teatro Carignano
	19	staging and distribution of costumes to the grooms and extras
	20	dress rehearsal of music with extras, and ballet in the Teatro Carignano
	21	dress rehearsal of the ballet in the evening, and after lunch of the extras and horses

The first of twenty-two performances was on 22 January. The Prince of Piedmont had been at least partly right. Though there is no mention of elephants or camels, the horses certainly were there. The list of 152 (!) extras for this production includes thirteen for the Persian Cavalry, and thirteen for the Macedonian,<sup>70</sup> which undoubtedly means that there were twenty-six horses onstage at once.<sup>71</sup> Lady Mary Coke, who spent the months of February and March in Turin, and who attended the opera “constantly,” thought that the primo soprano for these two operas, the castrato Venanzio Rauzzini, and the prima donna, Elisabetta Taiber, were “very good.”<sup>72</sup> Twenty years later Viotti would perform several times in Rauzzini’s concerts in Bath.

Listed in table 1.1 are the operas Viotti played in his six seasons as a member of the orchestra of the Teatro Regio. All of these opere serie were composed for the Teatro Regio, most of them destined not to be performed elsewhere. Most of them, and their composers, are now forgotten, but opera seria held the stage through most of the century everywhere except in France. Spectacle and the high soprano voice, particularly the castrato, were the main attractions. A glance at their titles reveals their subjects—based mostly on mythology or classical history, around which elaborately artificial plots were constructed. With

Table 1.1. Teatro Regio, 1773–79: Operas Performed

Season	Opera	Composer(s)
1773–74	<i>Antigona</i>	J. Mysliveček
	<i>La Disfatto di Dario</i>	G. Masi
1774–75	<i>Merope</i>	P. Guglielmi
	<i>L'Isola di Alcina ossia Alcina e Ruggiero</i>	F. Alessandri
Autumn 1775	<i>L'Aurora</i>	G. Pugnani
1775–76	<i>Cleopatra</i>	C. Monza
	<i>Sicotenca</i>	G. M. Rutini
1776–77	<i>Calipso</i>	B. Ottani
	<i>Gengis-Kan</i>	P. Anfossi
1777–78	<i>Medonte</i>	G. F. Bertoni
	<i>Eumene</i>	G. Insanguine, G. F. De Majo, and P. Errichelli
1778–79	<i>Lucio Silla</i>	M. Mortellari
	<i>Fatima</i>	B. Ottani

their emphasis on high heroic deeds, the magnanimity of kings and exalted love, they were ideal court entertainments, but by the 1770s opera seria was a dying genre, giving way to the increasing popularity of comic opera.

Royal marriages afforded opportunities for the musicians of the Teatro Regio to earn extra money. On the occasion of the marriage of the Prince of Piedmont to the Princess Clothilde of France (the House of Savoy, as we have seen, was inclined to marry its sons and daughters into the Bourbon dynasty), there were eighteen days of festivities, beginning on 30 September 1775 with the “*Entrée solomnelle de la Cour dans Turin*” and including nine performances of Pugnani’s pastorale *L’Aurora*, two concerts and three balls, culminating in a “*Chasse avec Bal à Stuping* [Stupinigi, the superb royal lodge near Turin].”<sup>73</sup> Viotti was paid L.60 to play in the opera; Pugnani was paid L.400, the others in proportion to their salaries at the Teatro Regio.

The musicians who played in the concerts and for the balls are not listed by name. Viotti had not yet joined the Cappella e Camera, which normally provided the players for these events. However, extra players (*non stipendiati da Sua Maesta*) were often hired for court functions, including the carnival balls, and, indeed, an entry in one of the royal registers records a payment of L.527.10 to Ignazio Celionat, including L.60 for having composed “*Arie di Balli*,” payments for copying, binding, and the fees for “players not in the pay of His Majesty who had the honor of playing for the Great Ball in the Salone of the Royal Palace on 7 October 1775.” Viotti, who by the end of the year was to become a supernumerary in the orchestra of the Cappella e Camera, would have been a likely

candidate for this honor. Present-day orchestral musicians may be interested to learn that, typically for these occasions, there were differences in the musicians' fees according to instrument: the fourteen violinists, six oboists, two clarinetists, four bassoonists, and six cellists were paid L.8 each, whereas the two contrabassists and the six horn players were paid L.10, and the timpanist, L.15. Instructive as well is the entry for an extra cellist who was hired, for L.18, to substitute in the three rehearsals (it would seem that it was only for the rehearsals!) for one of the regular players who had fallen ill.<sup>74</sup>

The musicians' contract for this marriage opera, with the signatures of Viotti and his colleagues affixed, is preserved in the civic archives of Turin.<sup>75</sup> It is typical of the Teatro Regio orchestra contracts of this period. The musicians are required to "be present in this city on 15 September to be ready for whatever instructions are given them" and there are clauses regarding promptness and absences. The players must be equipped with "instruments of the highest [*ottimo*] quality, with the understanding that they will be inspected carefully at the first rehearsal, and second-rate ones will be rejected. As regards violins and violas, the players must see to it that they are strung with thick strings [*che siano montati di grosso, cioè armati di corde grosse*]." (The directors of the Teatro Regio are to be commended for their scrupulous attention to detail; one is tempted to see here the influence of the commanding personality of Pugnani, who is known to have used unusually thick strings, though the Italian predilection for thicker strings predates him.<sup>76</sup> Thicker strings, with the greater bow pressure required to make them vibrate, produced a more robust, more substantial sound; for this reason Leopold Mozart urged their use in his treatise on violin playing of 1756. Did he admire the sound of the violins and violas of the Teatro Regio orchestra in 1771?)<sup>77</sup> Lastly, "excepting those who play the harpsichord, the first violinist [Pugnani], the principal of the second violins, the first cellist, and the first contrabassist and Sig. Secco [the first oboist] expressly, all the players are required to play the ballet music, with attentiveness and without carelessness." This last clause occurs often enough in these Teatro Regio contracts to suggest that it was, or had been, a point of contention, and that the playing of ballet music was viewed by the players with something less than enthusiasm.

Viotti's beginning salary at the Teatro Regio was L.120, raised to L.150 two years later, and to L.200 for the 1777–78 season (Pugnani's salary during this period was L.800).<sup>78</sup> Viotti continued in this orchestra for six years, remaining in the same chair, his last season being that of 1778–79.

The seeds of Viotti's lifelong, albeit sporadic involvement with the theater were sown here. As a theater musician he would have learned valuable lessons about the inner workings of operatic production, and his close association with Pugnani, an internationally known opera composer,<sup>79</sup> would have been a stimulus and an education. The opere serie in the Teatro Regio were the most prestigious, the most expensive productions, the only ones the royal family attended.

But it was the Italian *opere buffe* in the Teatro Carignano that were to tell more decisively on the future career of Viotti. The season lasted from the beginning of September to the end of November (occasionally there was a shorter season in the spring), and consisted of three or four operas, with a performance every evening except Friday, for a total of seventy-odd performances—altogether a busier schedule than that of the Teatro Regio. The season ended with three or four performances of a *pasticcio*. We have very little information about these opera buffa performances, in contrast with the relatively vast documentation that has survived regarding the Teatro Regio.<sup>80</sup> It is certain, however, that the orchestra of the Teatro Regio provided the players for the *opere buffe*, for which a relatively small group of about twenty-five players sufficed, namely a harpsichord, a cello, and a double bass for the recitatives, ten to fifteen violins, one or two violas, two or three cellos, one or two double basses, two oboes, and two horns. Most of the musicians were paid a sum equivalent to about two-thirds of their Teatro Regio salaries for playing the *opere buffe*. Visiting soloists who gave concerts at the Teatro Carignano were also probably accompanied by musicians selected from the Teatro Regio orchestra.<sup>81</sup>

It seems likely, though there is no direct proof, that Viotti played for the *opere buffe* in the Teatro Carignano. The available evidence suggests that the membership of the orchestra was fixed, rather than on a rotation system, as one might expect, since fewer players were required.<sup>82</sup> Listed in table 1.2 are the *opere buffe* performed in the Teatro Carignano during Viotti's permanency in the Teatro Regio orchestra. It was these works, surely, that were fundamental in forming the taste of the future director of the Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau in Paris beginning in 1789—an invaluable experience when he was faced with the responsibility of selecting its (exclusively) buffa repertory. The 1773 season has been included in the table, though we do not know when in that year Viotti's contract with the Nobile Società dei Cavalieri began. Similarly, it seems at least possible that he (and Pugnani) played in the autumn season of 1779—the last performance was on 27 November, leaving time enough before their departure from Italy. It will be seen that Paisiello was the most often performed composer, just as he was to be at the Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau, followed closely by Pasquale Anfossi. Almost all of these operas had been composed within the last two or three years; some had been premièred elsewhere in Italy only a few months before the Turin production.

We have no reason to suppose that Viotti's situation in the Palazzo di Cisterna was in any way affected by his having obtained a salaried post. In a later chapter we shall see that Viotti was enjoying Prince Alfonso's munificence as late as the year 1784. A document from the family archive in Biella suggests that, in the meantime, Prince Alfonso's patronage continued undiminished: "Statement of Expenditures made in the years 1772 and 1773 for the household of His Excellency the Prince della Cisterna."<sup>83</sup> This two-page summary divides expenses into

Table 1.2. Teatro Carignano, 1773–79: Operas Performed

Season	Opera	Composer
1773	<i>I filosofi immaginari</i>	? Not Paisiello's (1779)
	<i>L'innocente fortunata</i>	Paisiello
	<i>La contessa di Bimpimpoli</i>	Astaritta
1774	<i>Il principe ipocondriaco</i>	Astaritta
	<i>La cameriera per amore</i> (première)	Alessandri
	<i>La pupilla scaltra</i>	? Not Guglielmi's (1795)
1775	* <i>Il geloso [in cemento]</i>	Anfossi
	<i>La discordia fortunata</i>	Paisiello
	* <i>La frascatana</i>	Paisiello
	<i>L'incognita perseguitata</i>	Anfossi
1776	<i>L'avaro</i>	Anfossi
	<i>La vera costanza</i>	Anfossi
	<i>L'amor[e] artigiano</i>	Gassmann
	<i>La fiera di Venezia</i>	Salieri
1777 (spring)	<i>La virtuosa alla moda (La virtuosa moderna?)</i>	Franchini
(autumn)	<i>La finta giardiniera</i>	Anfossi
	* <i>Il tamburo notturno (Il tamburo)</i>	Paisiello
	<i>La costanza in amore</i>	? (G. Valentini?) <sup>a</sup>
	<i>L'idolo cinese</i>	Paisiello
	<i>La frascatana</i>	Paisiello
1778	<i>Il curioso indiscreto</i>	Anfossi
	* <i>Le gelosie villane</i>	Sarti
	* <i>La vendemmia</i>	Gazzaniga
	<i>Le due contesse</i>	Paisiello
1779	<i>Il francese bizzarro</i> (première)	Gresnick
	<i>Il matrimonio per vendetta</i>	? <sup>b</sup>
	* <i>L'italiana in Londra</i>	Cimarosa
	<i>Il militare bizzarro</i>	Sarti

<sup>a</sup>Valentini's *La costanza in amore* was so outdated (première in 1715) as to be extremely unlikely, but I was unable to find a more recent opera with that title.

<sup>b</sup>Anfossi's *Il matrimonio per inganno* was premièred in Florence in the spring of 1779.

ASCT, Collezione IX, Conti, 58:2; 59:7–8; 60:7–8; 61:7–8; 62:3–4, 7–8; 63:7–8; 64:7–8. These lists do not name the composers. In cases of doubt or of duplication I have chosen, where possible, the most likely names on the basis of chronological proximity of the first performance to the Carignano performances. Sources: Caselli 1969; Loewenberg 1943. An asterisk indicates an opera that was performed in Viotti's Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau in 1789–92.

five categories, the second of which is “Personal [*Particolare*] Expenditures for the Prince,” consisting of “money allocated to the Prince for the maintenance of his house in supplies, for his clothing, purchase of horses, payments to workmen for the carriages and equipment reserved for his use, and expenditures made for Viotti.” Since there is no itemization within the categories, it is impossible to know how much was spent on Viotti. But the fact that the “expenditures made

for Viotti” appear to be equivalent in importance to these other expenditures allows us to infer that they were not inconsiderable.

We have seen that Prince Alfonso received his first important court appointment in 1771, on 2 July, to be exact. In 1775 his honorarium as Second Equerry and Gentleman of the Table was L.325 annually (L.81.5 quarterly), as shown in the same court registers listing the salaries of the musicians.<sup>84</sup> He would inevitably be spending less and less time at home, as would Viotti, as their careers went their separate ways. On the other hand, the difference in their ages, an impediment to intimacy in 1766 when the prince was eighteen and the violinist eleven, may have become sufficiently unimportant by 1773, when their ages were twenty-five and eighteen, respectively, to permit a real friendship to develop.

On 20 October 1771 Maria Anna, aged eighteen, was married to a nobleman, a marquis; she was the last to leave the Palazzo della Cisterna. Perhaps Giambattista played at the celebrations that undoubtedly were held in the palace, though there is no record of expenses for them in the family archive.<sup>85</sup>

In 1773 Prince Alfonso began major renovations of his palace, including a complete refurbishment of his own apartments and those of his mother. On 6 August Viotti signed, as one of the witnesses, the contract between the prince and the chief builder.<sup>86</sup> Other than this, there is no record as to how Viotti’s daily life might have been disrupted by this extensive work, which lasted several years.

On 12 February 1774 Pugnani and Viotti were present at a masked ball in the theater of the prince Carignano, one of several balls usually given during the carnival period.<sup>87</sup> Shortly afterward, a booklet was published that raises intriguing questions about Viotti’s activities in the 1770s.<sup>88</sup> The booklet contains poems presented in homage to various persons attending the ball. Pugnani, “who is no less admirable for his goodness than for the charms of his violin,” is among the recipients of a poem, as is Viotti, “who one day will be without contradiction one of the first violinists of Italy.” But what is extraordinary about this seemingly trivial publication is the beginning of the laudatory dedication just quoted: “to young Viotti, [Pugnani’s] disciple, who has already shone in London and in Paris by the sweetness of his playing, as well as for his composing.” Viotti’s earliest biographers mention a trip to London and Paris in the company of Pugnani, just before Viotti’s Paris sojourn of 1782–92.<sup>89</sup> We have already encountered the unverifiable suggestion that Giambattista went to London as early as 1767, when he was twelve years old. This later possibility, too, is not supported by any documentary evidence, with one tantalizing exception: in the *Public Advertiser* of 13 May 1773 there is an advertisement for a benefit concert for the cellist Janson to be given that evening in Hickford’s Room, London. Included in the program is a trio to be played by Pugnani, “Viot,” and Janson.<sup>90</sup> It is a mystery. There is no other evidence that Viotti had accompanied his teacher on this, Pugnani’s second trip to London. Again, in October 1772, Pugnani had presented his letter of recommendation from the foreign minister of the Turin court to the Torinese ambassador in London.<sup>91</sup> Again, the ambassador makes no mention of Viotti in

his dispatch. But it seems unlikely that the author of this booklet, a man apparently on terms of easy familiarity with the recipients of the poems, would have invented from whole cloth such an important and such a recent event. At any rate, Pugnani had almost certainly returned to Turin by the end of July 1773, after a two-week stopover in Paris, in time for Viotti, had he been in the company of his teacher, to have signed the builder's contract on 6 August.

Extraordinary too is the reference to Viotti's composition(s). We have no certain knowledge of Viotti's youthful compositions, though Miel asserts that he composed his first violin concerto (no. 3) at the age of fourteen, that is, in 1769 or 1770.<sup>92</sup> That Viotti's compositions (a violin duet or a string trio seems more likely than a concerto) had apparently been heard in Paris and in London as early as 1774 is news indeed.

Later that same year, in November, the violinist Maddalena Lombardini-Sirmen again visited Turin; apparently she remained for several months. Since her previous visit she had performed to wide acclaim in Paris and London. This time the nineteen-year-old Giambattista might have listened to her with a more critical ear: he may have detected distinct differences between her style of playing and that of the Piedmontese school. Two contemporary reports help us to focus on these differences. First, Burney, who heard another Tartini pupil in Florence two months after hearing Pugnani in Turin:

[Pietro Nardini's] tone is even and sweet; not very loud, but clear and certain; he has a great deal of expression in his slow movements, which it is said, he has happily caught from his master Tartini. [...] his stile is delicate, judicious, and highly finished. Whoever has heard the polished performance of the celebrated Signora Sirmen, may form a pretty just idea of Signor Nardini's manner of playing.<sup>93</sup>

Second is Samuel Sharp, who heard Pugnani play at chapel in May 1766, and who does not mince words:

It is said that Pugnani draws out a louder tone from the upper part of the fiddle than Giardini does, and this, it must be granted, is his forte; but with submission to Italian ears, mine were a little shocked in several parts of his solo. I wished he had been a little more sweet, though he had been less forte; and, from this example of so excellent a performer, it may be suspected that a string, at a certain shortness, will not admit of sweetness beyond such a degree of loudness. His taste and elegance I thought by no means comparable to Giardini's.<sup>94</sup>

In a nutshell, then, the tradition of violin playing inherited by Viotti stressed a powerful tone, even to the point of sacrificing delicacy and finish. It was precisely these characteristics that were noticed by at least one critic at Viotti's Paris debut in 1782, and later recalled by his disciple Baillot, as we shall see in a later chapter.

☞ *Chapel and Chamber Musician* ☞

The next milestone in Viotti's career was his appointment, late in 1775, to the orchestra of the King's Music, the *Cappella e Camera*. The *maestro di cappella* was Francesco Saverio Giay (fl. 1764–92), a prolific composer of sacred music for the court, whose father had been the *maestro di cappella* before him. In the 1770s this organization had about ten singers, including a male soprano (castrato). The orchestra was roughly half the size of that of the Teatro Regio (about thirty players: an organist, thirteen–fifteen violins, one or two violas, four cellos, two double basses, at least four oboes, including one or two “bass oboes,”<sup>95</sup> and two horns), though their memberships overlapped considerably. On 7 May 1770 Pugnani had been appointed “Primo Suonatore di violino” of the *Cappella e Camera*, with a raise in salary from L.500 to L.1200.<sup>96</sup> Two months later, Charles Burney visited; his account merits extended quotation:

[T]he service is made very easy to them [i.e., the two Besozzis and Pugnani], as they only perform solos there, and those just when they please. The Maestro di Capella is Don Quirico Gasparini. In the [royal] chapel there is commonly a symphony played every morning, between 11 and 12 o'clock, by the King's band, which is divided into three orchestras and placed in three different galleries; and though far separated from each other, the performers know their business so well that there is no want of a person to beat time. [...] On festivals Signor Pugnani plays a solo, or the Bezozzis a duet, and sometimes motets are performed with voices. The organ is in the gallery which faces the king, and in this stands the principal first violin.

[...] Signor Pugnani played a concerto this morning [Saturday, 14 July] at the King's chapel, which was crowded on the occasion. It is an elegant rotund, built of black marble, and happily constructed for music, being very high, and terminated by a dome. I need say nothing of the performance of Signor Pugnani, his talents being too well known in England to require it. I shall only observe, that he did not appear to exert himself: and it is not to be wondered at, as neither his Sardinian majesty, nor any one of the numerous royal family, seem at present, to pay much attention to music.<sup>97</sup>

The inimitable Burney's description is, as always, wonderfully sharp-eyed, but it is misleading in several ways. Gasparini was the *maestro di cappella* not of the Royal Chapel but of the cathedral of Turin, San Giovanni.<sup>98</sup> And Burney seems to be describing two different spaces, though without saying so. (In his journal he says that he “saw the King 3 times at chapel where his attendance is very constant.”<sup>99</sup>) “The gallery which faces the king,” would appear to be the gallery or balcony, not in a chapel, but in the right transept of the cathedral, still

containing the organ, which faces the royal tribune in the left transept, in which the king sometimes heard Mass or other services on occasions when it was deemed appropriate to combine the ceremonies of the Royal Chapel with those of the cathedral (see figure 1.4). But, in that case, where were the other two galleries? There now seems to be a gallery directly above the king's tribune, and the third gallery was possibly in the balustrade on the edge of the floor of the Chapel of the Holy Shroud, overlooking the choir of the cathedral.<sup>100</sup> However, it is all but impossible to reconcile this description with the “elegant rotund, built of black marble,” which can only be the Chapel of the Holy Shroud itself. This darkly sumptuous room, where the famous relic had been enshrined since 1694, is behind the main altar of San Giovanni and abuts onto the royal palace, so that the king had direct access to it by way of a corridor. This chapel does have three balconies overlooking the interior, one or possibly two of which contained an organ,<sup>101</sup> but it is difficult to see how one of them could have faced the king. Moreover, the king presumably made use of still another space, the much less imposing private royal chapel within the Palazzo Reale. This room had only one gallery (over the entrance) for the organ and the musicians, a small one at that, with space for no more than twelve or fifteen players, which means that only about half of the orchestra could have played at any given time. Regrettably, these apparent contradictions and gaps in our knowledge persist. A tentative solution: The king, Charles Emmanuel III, who was known for his piety, heard a simple form of Mass, or devotions, probably early in the morning in the private chapel in the palace, with a reduced musical component. Then, at eleven o'clock, he attended the more elaborate ceremony in the Chapel of the Shroud (or, occasionally, in the cathedral), at which, according to Burney, “commonly” the *Messa Bassa* (Low Mass) was spoken in a low voice during the symphony, or, on festive occasions, a solo by Pugnani or a duet by the Besozzis was heard. According to the French traveler Lalande, the king heard mass in the Chapel of the Holy Shroud in summer, in the private chapel in winter,<sup>102</sup> which, if true, raises as many questions as it answers.

Another question arises, of interest to us because it concerns Viotti's daily professional routine for four years: *how* was the orchestra divided into three groups? There can be no question of this division somehow reflecting the repertory of the orchestra. Much of the music performed in the Royal Chapel and in the cathedral was composed by Giay and Gasparini, respectively. Their music (a great deal of it has been preserved in manuscript form in the cathedral archives)<sup>103</sup>—masses, motets, settings of psalms, various ceremonial works such as *Te Deum* and *Miserere*—shows considerable variety in its vocal and instrumental combinations,<sup>104</sup> but does not seem to have exploited to any great extent the antiphonal technique of chorus against chorus or instrumental groups answering each other in the *cori spezzati* style formerly fashionable in Venice and Rome. Was there then a more or less established arrangement by which the musicians were dispersed in the three balconies? For example: 1) the leader (Pugnani, who

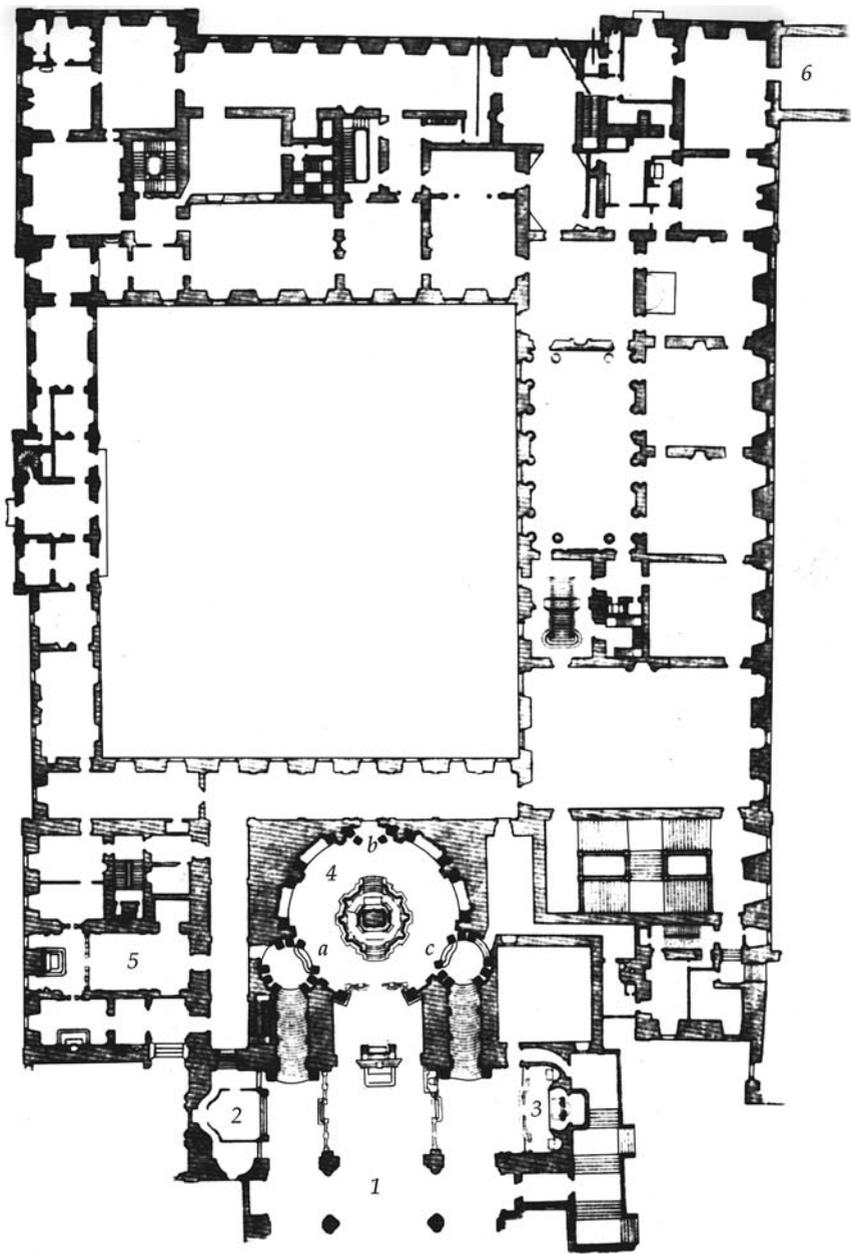


Figure 1.4. Architectural plan of the Cathedral of San Giovanni, the Chapel of the Holy Shroud and the Palazzo Reale, Turin. Adapted from the volume *Palazzo Reale* with the kind permission of Daniela Piazza Editore. Key: 1, nave of the cathedral; 2, royal tribune; 3, organ loft with musicians' gallery; 4, Chapel of the Holy Shroud, with three balconies; 5, royal chapel; 6, rooms and corridor leading to the Teatro Regio.

stood, as presumably the other violinists and the violists did), the organ, and the continuo instruments, probably a cello, a double bass, and a bassoon; 2) the violins (If so, this balcony would have been crowded—possibly a few of them stood with the leader. Or were the first and second violins in separate galleries?); 3) the violas, two or three cellos, a double bass, oboes, and horns. As for the “motets performed with voices,” Giay and Gasparini composed several motets, most of them with orchestral accompaniment. Did the singers also stand in the balconies?

Of course, not all the musicians performed every piece. For example, Pugnani’s concerto probably required only string accompaniment, possibly with pairs of oboes and horns. Then too, Burney’s understanding of the term *symphony* may not correspond precisely to ours. Thirty-four of Haydn’s symphonies, ranging from no. 1 to no. 89, are listed in the catalogue of the Royal Chapel.<sup>105</sup> That all of these manuscript sets of parts date from the mid-nineteenth century does not exclude the possibility that some of them are copies of earlier sets of parts, some perhaps acquired by 1776, so that they could have formed part of the repertory that Viotti played. Pugnani’s symphonies, of which seven survive, may have been among those performed every morning. Stylistically they resembled those of the contemporary Mannheim and Vienna composers and often included a minuet as the third movement.<sup>106</sup> Was Gasparini shocked at the inclusion of a dance movement in such a sacred context? At any rate, this vocal-orchestral repertory constituted Viotti’s first sustained ensemble experience outside of opera.

We must doubt that Pugnani and the Bezozzis performed only solos in the chapel services—on special occasions, perhaps, but surely in the normal services Pugnani would have been expected to lead the orchestra, small though it was. Finally, we have seen that some members of the royal family did at least take a lively interest in the opera, something that Burney could not have observed in July.

It seems likely that the fifteen-year-old Viotti, who had been studying with Pugnani for only a few months, had attended this same festive ceremony to hear his master play. Indeed we may well suppose that such events were a regular part of Viotti’s musical education.<sup>107</sup> The redoubtable Englishman would perhaps not have noticed him, but, as a foreigner of some renown, he himself would have been relatively easy to distinguish in the crowded chapel. Burney, of course, was not to know that twenty-four years later, he would be attending a concert in London at which Pugnani’s pupil was one of the star attractions.<sup>108</sup>

On 27 December 1775 Viotti was taken on as a supernumerary: “Council of the Royal Household. On the information received concerning the abilities of Giovanni Battista Viotti, we are graciously pleased to appoint him as a supernumerary violinist in Our Chapel and Chamber; we therefore decree that he be so designated in the accounts.”<sup>109</sup> Despite this mention of the accounts, a

supernumerary musician was normally hired for a trial period during which he received no pay; when a vacancy occurred he became eligible for the permanent post.

Only five days earlier, on 22 December, Pugnani and five other musicians in the *Capella e Camera* had been granted substantial increases in their salaries, in the case of Pugnani, from L.1200 to L.1500 annually.<sup>110</sup> And on 19 January 1776 Pugnani and Alessandro Besozzi, the first oboist of the Royal Chapel, were both granted the title of *Primo Virtuoso della Camera e Direttore Generale della Musica Istrumentale*.<sup>111</sup>

On 5 March 1776 Viotti became a full-fledged member of the orchestra of the Royal Chapel. The fact is duly recorded in the Royal Household accounts;<sup>112</sup> there is a related document, in the State Archive in Biella,<sup>113</sup> that powerfully evokes the status of a court musician as, in the first instance, a servant of the Crown. It is the Act of Appointment of Viotti to the king's *Capella e Camera*, dated 5 March 1776. With it is the printed text of the oath that Viotti was twice required to pronounce, once for the *Camera* on 28 March, "before noon," and again for the *Cappella*, after considerable delay, on 3 December, "after noon." (The presence of this document in the Cisterna family archive suggests that Viotti was still living in the prince's palace in 1776.)

The text of the oath, too long to quote in its entirety, is primarily a detailed undertaking of fealty and submission to the king—uncompromising, even alarming in its severity:

with all my ability, vigilance, and loyalty to fulfil my assigned duties, and to execute all that is required of me by my superiors in the service of His Majesty, and to have my subordinates perform likewise, even at peril of life, indeed to lose it rather than ever to conduct myself, or to consent directly or indirectly in any way to anything against the interests of the Person, the House, the Territories, the honor or the Administration of His Majesty.

Viotti took the oath for the *Cappella* "in Torino in a room of the residence of His Excellency Monsgr. Francesco Rorà, archbishop of Torino." This was none other than the "discoverer" of Viotti, the man who, as bishop of Ivrea, had interceded on Viotti's behalf with the Marchesa di Voghera ten years earlier after being charmed by the boy's playing and demeanor at a dinner concert.

On both occasions Viotti's oath taking was certified in the hand of the presiding court official as follows: "Having personally presented himself, Sigr. Gio. Batta. Viotti, who, with head bared, his right hand on the Sacred Evangelists, without sword [this phrase is omitted for the *Capella*], and kneeling, has sworn..." Rarely have the dusty archives of eighteenth-century institutions yielded up such a vivid vignette. We see the violinist in our mind's eye, a shaft of the wan winter afternoon light on his blond hair, as he kneels before the

prelate, who holds the sacred text. We may presume that the archbishop had maintained a personal interest in the twenty-one-year-old musician, who had come so far. Could he have imagined how much further he would go?<sup>114</sup>

Viotti almost certainly played the viola during his first year in the orchestra of the royal Chapel and Chamber. The Act of Appointment refers to him as a “suonatore di violino” but stipulates that “he must play those other instruments at which he is proficient when ordered to by those in authority.” The man whom Viotti replaced, one Giovanni Toso, though also referred to as a violinist in the same document, played the viola in the orchestra. All four of the quarterly orchestra stipend lists for 1776 in the registers of the Administration of the Royal Household clearly show Viotti as one of two players in the viola section.<sup>115</sup> Toso played until 5 March, when Viotti took his place; the first quarterly payment was divided between them proportionately. Beginning in the first quarter of 1777, Viotti appears in the last (seventh) chair of the first violins, which place he occupied until he left Italy in December 1779.

Pugnani, who enjoyed unchallenged sway over the orchestra, certainly over the strings, may have wished to give Viotti the benefit of a year’s experience as a violist. In any case the balance of numbers among the string sections was sufficiently flexible to allow Viotti to play the viola some of the time, the violin other times, as the repertory demanded, and as Pugnani deemed appropriate. This is perhaps the most likely possibility. Indeed, in the 1770s the viola “section” varied between one and two players (in all of 1781 and the first three quarters of 1782 there were none listed). The “neglect” of the viola section was characteristic of Italian and French orchestras, and reflects the prevailing musical style of the period, particularly the Italian style, which emphasized the melody, the bass providing the harmonic foundation, and the middle or inner parts, normally played by the violas, given less importance. In Viotti’s own first nineteen violin concertos, for Paris, the violas are confined almost entirely to the *tutti*; in the accompanying passages the orchestra is typically reduced to the first and second violins and bass (cellos and double basses).

Viotti’s salary remained at L.200, by far one of the two or three lowest in the orchestra. Perhaps not too much significance should be attached to this fact. It is difficult to know the basis for the rather considerable differences among the salaries of the orchestral musicians both of the Royal Chapel and Chamber and of the Teatro Regio. Criteria neither of merit nor of seniority seem to have been applied with consistency. To take one example, the violinist Carlo Antonio Celoniat’s salary at the Teatro Regio, as a member of the first violin section, remained at L.130 from 1765 until 1780. Viotti, in the second violins, entered at L.120, but, as we have seen, after two years went to L.150 and after another two years, to L.200. But in the chapel orchestra Celoniat’s salary was L.250, while Viotti’s remained at L.200, though he was in the first violin section and Celoniat was in the second violins. However, in the four years that Viotti was a member of the chapel orchestra, only one player, a double bassist, was given a raise. It is

possible that if Viotti had remained longer his salary would have been brought up to the level of most of the other section violinists.

We have seen that balls were a regular feature of the carnival festivities. In Viotti's time about ten carnival balls were normally held in the Palazzo Reale. Balls were also held at various times of the year in the royal palaces outside the city—Venaria, Moncalieri, and Stupinigi—and as part of the celebrations for royal births and marriages. These performances would have been a regular part of the Royal Chapel and Chamber musicians' workload. The only relevant references in the Chapel and Chamber accounts consist of lists of ten to twelve extra (*straordinari*) players, most of them drawn from the orchestra of the Teatro Regio, sometimes named, sometimes listed only by instrument: four or five violins, who were paid L.5 per ball, four or five cellos, and sometimes an oboe and/or a double bass, who were paid L.6.<sup>116</sup> They were presumably brought in to augment the Chapel and Chamber orchestra, which suggests that, if most of the members played, the orchestra for these balls contained upward of thirty musicians. Viotti's name is not to be found on these orchestra lists for the years 1774 and 1775, when he was a member of the Teatro Regio orchestra but not yet of the Royal Chapel and Chamber. But there is every reason to believe that he participated when he was a member of the latter group. There were also twelve to fifteen masked balls in the Teatro Carignano during carnival time, usually with an orchestra of eighteen musicians, paid by the Teatro Regio and presumably drawn from its orchestra. The Teatro records do not reveal the instrumentation of this orchestra (which probably included at least eight violins), nor the names of the players, nor whether it was a fixed group from year to year, or organized on a rotation basis.<sup>117</sup> We cannot know whether Viotti participated, though it is entirely possible that he did. Was he a member of the orchestra for the masked ball on 12 February 1774 when he and Pugnani were each presented with a poem?

Concerts were also occasionally given at various times throughout the year at court, again by members of the Chapel and Chamber orchestra. We have very few details, but the available evidence suggests that these were not very frequent, perhaps five or six in a year. One concert we know of was given at Venaria on 24 May 1776, the birthday of the Prince of Piedmont.<sup>118</sup> We can only guess as to the programs of these concerts; surely they included works of composer-members of the orchestra—Pugnani, Ignazio Celoniat, and others. And Viotti? Would he have been given the honor of playing a concerto? On 4 March 1779 the copyist of the chapel orchestra was paid L.41.10 to copy eighty-three pages of music (orchestral parts)—fifty-three pages of minuets and contradanze for court balls, and thirty pages for two sinfonie concertante.<sup>119</sup> These last were to “remain in the collection” (*che restano in fondo*) of the Royal Chapel. Whether or not they were sinfonie concertante in the now-accepted meaning of this term, that is, concertos for two or more solo instruments with orchestra, these two works are no longer to be found in the Royal Chapel collection, nor are any

works by Pugnani or Viotti.<sup>120</sup> Viotti's two known symphonies concertantes, for two violins and orchestra, were performed in 1787 in Paris.

In 1772, the indefatigable Ignazio Celoniat was given permission by the Nobile Società dei Cavalieri to organize a series of summer concerts in the Teatro Carignano, consisting of both instrumental and vocal pieces.<sup>121</sup> There is no record of this having been repeated in any subsequent year, nor do we know which musicians participated. Could the seventeen-year-old Viotti have been among them?

We have no knowledge, throughout this period, of how often Viotti was able to visit his native village, to see his father and stepmother and their growing family. His only documented visit has already been noted—when he was a witness at the baptism of his half-sister Domenica Appolonia on 10 February 1767, as recorded in the register of births of Fontanetto. But we must suppose that he found time to return to Fontanetto occasionally. If, as Negri asserts, he was always accompanied by a servant, Giambattista's visits would not have gone unnoticed. As for Felice Viotto, only one notice of him in this period has surfaced. On 15 June 1774, he paid L.9 to the authorities of the Church of Santa Maria in Fontanetto for "four old pieces of furniture."<sup>122</sup> Did the blacksmith want them for his house, or did he resell them at a profit?

We come now to the second great upheaval in Viotti's life and career. He and his teacher are about to embark on a two-year-long European tour. It is December 1779—Viotti is twenty-four years old. So far as we know, he is still living in the Palazzo della Cisterna. Since 1773 he has been a member of the orchestra of the Teatro Regio, since 1776, that of the Royal Chapel. With the sole exception of the 1774 masked ball booklet, the existing documentation of Viotti's Turin years might well lead one to believe that he was destined for an unremarkable career as a rank-and-file orchestral violinist. And yet, within a month of his leaving Italy Viotti was reliably reported to be a better player than his teacher, and within another three or four years he had established himself as the first violinist of Europe. It is highly unlikely that Viotti could have sprung thus fully armed without some previous solo experience.<sup>123</sup> It is safe to assume that in the 1770s he had played concertos and sonatas in and around Turin, in churches and in private concerts in palaces such as those of the Prince Carignano, the Archbishop Rorà, and the Prince della Cisterna.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, Viotti, unlike his teacher, has not moved up in the ranks. There is no sign that he was being groomed as Pugnani's eventual successor, or that he considered himself a candidate for this honor. But there can be no doubt that he was fully aware that he stood head and shoulders above his colleagues—we shall see that false modesty was not in his character. How then to fulfill his extraordinary talent?

It may come as a surprise to some readers to learn that in the eighteenth century all of the prominent violin soloists of Europe, without exception, were