

WORKS FOR TWO CELLOS

A. KRAFT • N. KRAFT • ROMBERG

Alexander Rudin, Emin Martirosian, Cello
Musica Viva Moscow Chamber Orchestra



Bernhard Heinrich Romberg (1767–1841) • Anton Kraft (1749–1820)

Nikolaus Kraft (1778–1853): Works for Two Cellos

The cello blossomed as a solo instrument across Europe at the turn of the 19th century. Building on the foundations laid by Boccherini, Haydn and Beethoven, composers spent more time exploring the instrument's melodic potential and in particular its sonorous upper register. As a result of their efforts, works for two or more cellos became increasingly commonplace, no longer the relative rarity they were when Vivaldi wrote his *Concerto for Two Cellos* in the 1720s.

The publication of Beethoven's two *Op. 5* sonatas for piano and cello in 1797 represented a key milestone in the development of the cello. Presenting both instruments on an equal footing, Beethoven gave the first Viennese performance of the works at the piano alongside his good friend, German cellist Bernhard Romberg.

Romberg and Beethoven first met in the Bonn electoral orchestra in 1790, where Beethoven played viola. A firm musical relationship ensued, with Romberg gaining Beethoven's admiration enough to be entrusted with early rehearsals for the 'Razumovsky' quartets. The cellist, however, reacted against Beethoven's innovations, and is said to have thrown his music to the ground when playing the opening solo from the second movement of the first quartet.

Romberg toured Europe tirelessly as a soloist and composer, completing nine published cello concertos and many works besides. He made several innovations to cello design and performance practice, including a lengthening of the fingerboard and a provision for the 'C' string to vibrate more freely, strengthening the instrument's melodic properties.

Romberg has suffered criticism from Beethoven biographers on the standard of his compositions, but one listen to his *Concertino for Two Cellos and Orchestra in A major* refutes their judgement. This mature work, written in 1841, the last year of the composer's life, illustrates how far cello writing had progressed.

Scored for the two soloists with wind, strings and timpani, the *Concertino* begins with a bold call to arms from the orchestra, its bright theme taken up in close harmony by the cellists. The first soloist then takes a more obvious lead while the second applies a set of decorative countermelodies. The two often dovetail in melodic intervals a third or a sixth apart, playing above the orchestra as Romberg shows off their virtuoso attributes.

The *Concertino* is in three sections, the second headed by a lyrical theme over a gently rocking accompaniment in D major. It soon returns to A major for a rustic theme and playful interplay between the soloists. The music wears a ready smile with its open, attractive scoring, in spite of a brief, darker aside in A minor towards the end. A single stroke from the timpani soon returns us to the main theme.

The Czech composer and cellist Anton Kraft was another figure with strong Beethovenian connections. He was part of the ensemble that gave the first performances of the composer's *Piano Trios, Op. 1* in 1795, while Beethoven is also thought to have written the cello part of the *Triple Concerto* for him. Before this, Kraft was principal cellist in Haydn's orchestra at Esterházy from 1778 to 1790, where he gained a reputation for virtuoso playing and particular skill in the higher register of the instrument. Inspired by Kraft's playing, Haydn composed his *Cello Concerto No. 2 in D major* for him in 1783, taking his technical advice as he wrote.

Kraft and his son Nikolaus, also a cellist and composer, worked closely together. It is thought the *Grand Duo* was written for the two to perform, with the work published in Vienna in 1808 while Kraft served at the court of Prince Joseph Franz von Lobkowitz. The intimacy of the cello writing, with parts closely dovetailed, suggests a function beyond mere domestic use.

The *Grand Duo in G minor* starts boldly, its introduction notably influenced by the *Sturm und Drang* period, with harmonic ambiguity eventually resolving into the home key. This leads to a soulful main theme, with which Kraft explores a range of inventive timbres and techniques, with harmonics and pizzicato in play. The use of silence – a favourite ploy of Haydn's – enhances the witty exchanges.

The tender *Adagio* strips the texture back to single lines of counterpoint, its contemplative moments contrasted by a briefly animated central section. The open ending of this movement cuts directly to the finale, a *Rondo* with an upright march theme of Mozartian quality. This has an attractive cantabile second subject, before Kraft switches to the major key for a bustling coda.

Although he dropped the 'Grand' moniker for his *Duo in D major*, Kraft's next work for two cellos proves even more substantial than the first. The interesting sleights of tonality remain, and the close shadowing between parts, but this is a more genial work. Again, the composer looks towards the top end of the cello for melodic interest, the players often several octaves apart as they play.

The D major *Duo* also has a vocal quality in its writing, along with a playfulness exploited in the substantial first movement. The theme uses the D major triad but as it develops Kraft again uses pizzicato and harmonic effects. The two instruments share their melodic lines frequently, as though in deep conversation, before the second theme enjoys a rich and mellow B minor setting. The movement concludes with playful exchanges and expansive double-stopping.

The second movement, marked *Adagio sostenuto*, is in A major and begins with a theme of tender quality, taking its time in the way a Bach sarabande might do. Gradually, Kraft extends the reach of his melodies, the cellos' rhythmic profile becoming increasingly animated before the warm-hearted atmosphere of the opening returns.

As a contrast, Kraft writes a perky finale in dance form. Marked *Tempo comodo*, its jaunty theme keeps the duo close together before they plot their own course as soloists. The second theme has a rustic quality, with drone-like fifths from the second cello, while the central section includes winsome pizzicato exchanges, harmonic tricks and a brief dalliance with the minor key. Both cellists end the work with a flourish.

Anton Kraft's son Nikolaus was born in Esterházy in 1778, just as his father began his employment with Haydn's orchestra. It was little surprise that he too developed into a cellist and composer, and as a late teenager Nikolaus and his father went on an extensive European concert tour, prior to an extended period of study with Jean-Pierre Duport in Berlin. Nikolaus wrote six cello concertos, and famously staked the claim that his father composed the concerto now known to be Haydn's *Second*. The claim was held as firm evidence only until Haydn's autograph score was discovered in 1951.

Nikolaus and pianist-composer Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Haydn's successor at Esterházy, toured the Rhine region in 1818, where they met Bernhard Romberg. Both cellist-composers are said to have given performances in Stuttgart in 1820 of a *Concerto in C major for Two Cellos*. That work is thought to be the one included here, titled *Concertino* and receiving its first recording.

Nikolaus Kraft writes with great familiarity for the cello, like Romberg, employing three sections with the slightest pause between each. A virtuoso vehicle for its soloists, the *Concertino* retains a healthy and fulfilling dialogue with the orchestra as Kraft develops his melodic material. The bold first theme is contrasted by a good-natured and flowing second, where the cellists enjoy a close rapport. They are, however, encouraged to spread their wings, again working in higher melodies with a harmonic profile suggesting a composer willing to explore his boundaries.

Each of these four works illustrates how the cello had grown into an instrument capable of replicating the human voice, now able to hold long, legato melodies. The influence of Haydn and Beethoven can still be discerned, but these three individual voices led their instrument into a Golden Age from which its profile would never decline.

Ben Hogwood

Alexander Rudin

Photo courtesy of the Musica Viva Orchestra



Alexander Rudin is a world-renowned cellist, conductor, pianist and teacher. His vast repertoire encompasses a wide variety of works for cello that spans four centuries and includes many rarities and premieres, from concertos by C.P.E. Bach, Triklir and Dvořák to contemporary pieces by composers such as Arvo Pärt, Andrei Golovin and Valentin Silvestrov. His discography includes the critically acclaimed releases *Bach: Complete Cello Suites* (Naxos 8.555992-93) and *Early Cello Music* with Musica Viva (Chandos). Rudin is a professor at the Moscow State Conservatory. He has served as artistic director and principal conductor of Musica Viva Moscow Chamber Orchestra since 1988.

Emin Martirosian



Photo courtesy of the Musica Viva Orchestra

Emin Martirosian (b. 1987, Yerevan) graduated from Moscow State Conservatory in 2011, where he studied cello with Alexey Seleznev and piano with Natalia Yurygina. He has performed across France, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey, Moldova and the Czech Republic. In 2010 Martirosian was awarded First Prize at the XV Canetti International Music Festival (Israel), and, as part of a trio, the Grand Prix at the Maria Yudina International Competition for chamber ensembles (Russia). Martirosian is currently a soloist and member of the Musica Viva Moscow Chamber Orchestra.

Musica Viva Moscow Chamber Orchestra (Artistic director: Alexander Rudin)



Photo courtesy of the Musica Viva Orchestra

The Musica Viva Moscow Chamber Orchestra is a unique ensemble that performs in various genres, styles and formations, from Baroque repertoire on period instruments to large Romantic symphonies. The orchestra has given the first Russian performances of works by Handel, Cimarosa, Kozlovsky and Degtyarev among many others, as well as performing the music of contemporary composers such as Avro Pärt, Valentin Silvestrov and Tigran Mansurian. Musica Viva regularly collaborates with world-renowned artists such as Roger Norrington, Vladimir Jurowsky and Christian Tetzlaff. The orchestra's discography comprises around 30 albums of diverse repertoire for labels such as Chandos and Naxos.

The emergence of the cello as a solo instrument at the beginning of the 19th century encouraged composers to explore its melodic and sonorous potential, with compositions for two or more cellos becoming increasingly popular. Bernhard Romberg and Anton Kraft both had personal connections to Beethoven – their works offer inventive timbres, intimacy and substantial virtuosity. The world premiere recording of the sparkling *Concertino* by Kraft's son Nikolaus completes an album of unique gems, influenced by Beethoven and Haydn, which helped to usher in the golden age of the cello.

WORKS FOR TWO CELLOS

- Bernhard Heinrich Romberg (1767–1841)**
[1] **Concertino for Two Cellos in A major, Op. 72 (1841)** **14:21**
- Anton Kraft (1749–1820)**
Grand Duo for Two Cellos in G minor, Op. 5 (pub. 1808) **19:27**
- [2] **I. Allegro risoluto – Andante – Moderato** **9:44**
[3] **II. Adagio – Adagio cantabile –** **3:17**
[4] **III. Rondo: Allegro non troppo** **6:26**
- Duo for Two Cellos in D major, Op. 6 (pub. 1808)** **22:12**
- [5] **I. Allegro moderato** **9:44**
[6] **II. Adagio sostenuto** **5:27**
[7] **III. Finale: Tempo comodo** **7:01**
- Nikolaus Kraft (1778–1853)**
[8] **Concertino for Two Cellos in C major (date unknown)*** **14:30**

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Alexander Rudin, Cello I [1–4] [8], Cello II [5–7], Conductor [1] [8]

Emin Martirosian, Cello I [5–7], Cello II [1–4] [8]

Musica Viva Moscow Chamber Orchestra [1] [8]

Artistic director: Alexander Rudin

Recorded: 23 July 2020 at the Moscow Tonstudio, Mosfilm [1] [8]; 13 November [2–4] and 3 December [5–7] 2020 at the Moscow Radio Studio, Moscow, Russia • Producer: Alexander Rudin
Engineer and editor: Ilya Dontsov • Booklet notes: Ben Hogwood • Publishers: Breitkopf und Härtel (1842) [1], Vienna: Au Magasin de l'imprimerie chimique (1808) [2–7], Manuscript [8] • Cover: *Court concert with the Prince Bishop of Liège at Seraing Castle* (1753) (detail) by Paul-Joseph Delcloche (1716–1759)

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