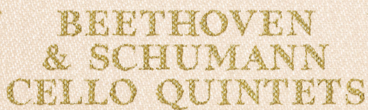
deux-elles



Consone Quartet with Kate Bennett Wadsworth

While many Romantic-era arrangements provide chamber versions of orchestral or operatic works - the equivalent of a home sound system - this arrangement of Beethoven's Sonata for Piano and Cello, Op. 5 No. 1 by Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838) was different. Beethoven's work here is scaled up, rather than scaled down, with a virtuosic duo recast as a Grand Quintuor Concertant, effectively turning a competition between two people into a lively conversation among five.

This reimagining of Beethoven's music is less of an impertinence than it may seem at first. Ries was Beethoven's student, assistant, and confidant during his years in Vienna, and later his advocate in London, eventually commissioning the Ninth Symphony. Ries was trusted throughout his life as an arranger of Beethoven's music, even by Beethoven himself: in his *Biographische Notitzen über Ludwig van Beethoven*, Ries reports that some of his arrangements were even checked over by Beethoven and then published under Beethoven's name. Ries' book is also a treasure trove of anecdotes, showing what life was like for someone who not only was close to Beethoven, but also had a native speaker's grasp of his compositional language. Here is one of my favourite scenes:

> “ One evening I went to Baden to continue my lessons with him. There I found a handsome young woman sitting beside him on the sofa. Feeling that I had come at an inopportune moment, I wanted to leave immediately, but Beethoven detained me and said: “Sit down and play for a while!”
>
> He and the lady remained seated behind me. I had already been playing for a long time when Beethoven suddenly called out: “Ries! Play something romantic!” Soon after: “Something melancholy!” Then: “Something passionate!” and so on.
>
> From what I could hear I deduced that he had evidently offended the lady somehow and now was trying to make up for it by amusing her. Finally he jumped up and shouted: “Why, those are all things I have written!” I had been playing nothing but movements from his own works all the time, connecting them with

small transition passages, which seemed to please him. The lady soon left and, to my great surprise, Beethoven did not know who she was. ”

Beethoven's use of Ries as a human mood playlist suggests that Ries must have been able to conceive of Beethoven's music in three ways at once. First, he had to know Beethoven's compositions from memory; second, he had to have had this music filed away in his mind organised by mood, rather than any formal characteristics; third, he had to improvise seamless transitions between whatever he was playing when Beethoven called out to him and whatever work of Beethoven's occurred to him in that moment. Small wonder, then, that this man was considered to be Beethoven's ideal translator of music!

In my own musical training, I had been taught to use the score as a sort of sacred text: not only to play exactly what the composer wrote, but to meditate on every detail until it revealed something about the nature of the work. Early music culture is very freeing in this respect: for anything written before 1800, it is now the norm to improvise embellishments that blend a piece of music with something of oneself, and there is now a lively cohort of scholar-performers experimenting with even freer styles of improvisation, such as the extemporaneous preluding and linking that Ries refers to in the scene above. The bulk of the 19th century, on the other hand, occupies a strange position in our thinking: it is credited (or blamed) for a shift in musical culture that deifies the composer, turning a musical score into that inviolable sacred text, and it is also denigrated for producing mountains of "bad editions" that violate the text.

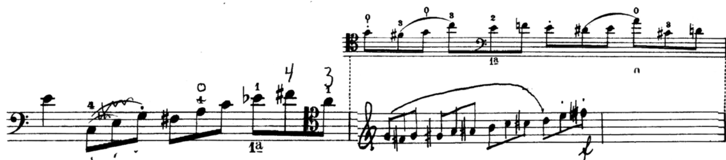
Several years ago, I stumbled on a curious passage in a letter from the great cellist and paedagogue, Friedrich Grützmacher (1832-1903), to Edition Peters on 12 December, 1883. The publisher had asked him to add his bowings and fingerings to the Schumann Cello Concerto for an upcoming edition, and he replied that it would not be possible to make a good edition without also changing some of the notes:

“ The Schumann Concerto, as written, is impossible to play; every cellist modifies it in his own (naturally often inadequate) way, and therefore a tried and tested, effective, and (if ▸

> I may say so) a reverently faithful [pietätsvoll] version would be eagerly welcomed. ”

Grützmacher's editions are notorious today as "bad editions", due to his use of paraphrase, which ranges from the very discreet to the wildly indiscreet. What this letter suggests, on the other hand, is that his colleagues used at least as much paraphrase in performance, and Grützmacher is unusual only in that he was conscientious enough to write it all down.

Thanks to a Leverhulme fellowship at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, I was able to spend three years tracking down some of the adjusted versions of the Schumann Concerto alluded to by Grützmacher, to see if I could find a pattern in what was changed and why. As a result of the various cellists' rewrites I found - both published and unpublished - a picture began to form in my mind of a 19th-century faithful paraphrase. It looked as though a cello concerto contained certain "cello zones" that could be altered to help the soloist bring the general sweep of the music across: passagework (especially at the end of solo sections), the cadenza, and the coda. In general, these rewrites were not any easier to play than the original passages, but they often repaid one's effort more richly: by knitting the composition more closely to cello technique, it became easier to make the fiery moments sound fiery and to make the weightless moments sound weightless. If these cellists, like Ries, had the ability



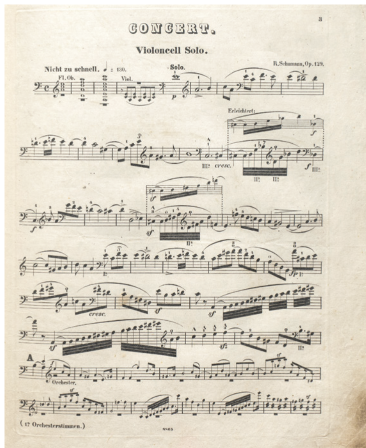
A personal pasteover from the collection of Alfred Richter, stamped Rudolf Metzmacher and marked "Cossmann's fingerings and cadenza". Bernhard Cossmann (1822-1910) was one of the first major cellists to tour with the Schumann Concerto.

to create their own music, and to store existing music in their minds according to its emotional effect, then it would indeed have been possible - even praiseworthy - to create the composers' intended sounds by changing the written notes.

But how could they know, and how can we hope to know, what sounds or effects the composer had in mind? One perfectly valid answer is that we can't, and therefore that we are stuck following the notes and hoping that the composition will somehow come across. However, there is another valid answer: Schumann lived in the same period as the musicians who believed a faithful paraphrase was possible. Schumann himself paraphrased other composers' work, for example by adding a piano accompaniment to the Bach Cello Suites. He also wrote copious and very charismatic music criticism, granting us access to the enchanted world of his musical imagination. Perhaps we really can know his intentions, at least as he would have understood the term.

In the case of the Cello Concerto, there is some even more specific information that could help adventurous cellists to privilege the sounds over the notes. The first edition, which Schumann prepared himself, included several short passages with alternative notes marked on another stave.

Since most of these alternatives are marked "erleichtert" (made easier), I thought of them at first as capitulations to the demands of the cellists who had read the concerto through with him prior to publication, such as Christian Reimers (1827-89) or Robert Emil Bockmühl (1812-81). It seems to me now, however, that Schumann's alternatives are very different from the cellists' rewrites I had seen. For one thing, Schumann's alternatives are not limited to the "cello zones": the first one appears in the second phrase of the concerto, simplifying an ornament that does not seem to have fazed any of the cellists. For another, although Schumann's simplifications do seem easier at first, they do not reward practice effort in the same way. Judging from their similarities with Schumann's original sketch and revised autograph of the concerto, they seem to be simply Schumann's paraphrases of his own ideas - two ways of saying the same thing.



One of Schumann's alternatives printed in the first edition.

Schumann's own transcription of the Cello Concerto for violin, which was never published but survives in a copyist's handwritten part, provides yet another window onto Schumann's self-paraphrase. Considering the cello part and the violin part side by side, certain passages begin to take on a palpable expressive or dramatic shape, independent of any specific notes or instructions. Schumann had even proposed making an arrangement of the Cello Concerto for cello and string quartet, a form in which earlier cello concertos had been published alongside the full score. Although Schumann's publisher turned down this offer, the suggestion of it has attracted a number of cellists in recent years to make their own chamber arrangements of the Schumann Cello Concerto. I am delighted to be joining in this present-day tradition of text flexibility, tinkering with the "cello zones" in the context of my own chamber arrangement.

As for sound: the first edition cello part is very rich in bowings and fingerings by Robert Emil Bockmühl, the cellist who worked intensively on the concerto in person with Schumann between 1852 and 1854. These bowings and fingerings, in conjunction with Bockmühl's cello method and other publications, create a picture of cello sound that is strikingly different from the sound we generally associate with Romantic cello playing. It is a picture with subtle colours and delicious ambiguities, full of natural harmonics and flute-like wanderings in the cello's "alto" register of the upper D and G strings - more

Boccherini than Dvořák. The bowing style of the passagework has a feathery quality, supported by a low elbow and high wrist and centred in the upper half of the bow - a posture still common today in folk fiddling - and the lyrical passages use a wide variety of bow speeds, often in quick succession, helping the sound to ripple and breathe.

Embracing this sound-world requires setting aside the fixation with power and clarity that invaded classical music performance in the mid-20th century, and whose influence endures not only in mainstream classical playing but in the historical performance movement as well. It is plain enough from Schumann's own writing, however, that power and clarity were the last things on his mind when he was listening to a musician he admired. When speaking of Frédéric Chopin's (1810-1849) piano playing, for example, Schuman writes:

> "Imagine an Aeolian harp that could play scales in all keys, and imagine that an artistic hand cast these into all manner of fantastical embellishments, yet in such a way that a deeper and deeper fundamental and a soft, singing upper voice could be heard - and one has an approximate picture of his playing."

Above all, it was Schumann's mention of an Aeolian harp that made the sound-world of the first edition come to life for me. Once considered a central paradigm of Romantic creativity, this instrument consisted of a simple, dulcimer-like resonating box with 8-12 gut strings all tuned in unison. It was placed in a window, where it could be "bowed" by the wind, producing a complex interplay of beats and overtones suggestive of harmony, rhythm, and sometimes even melody. Listening to various reconstructions of this instrument, wherever I could find them, was both tantalising and revelatory. The gentle pulsation of the lower frequencies, combined with the upper partials slowly pouring in from above, does ▸

An early 19th-century Aeolian harp housed in the Higgins Museum, Bedford.

indeed sound like a Chopin étude played on a Romantic-era piano. It also happens to sound like several moments in the Schumann Concerto: the opening, with the cello melody's eerily slow start over a faintly syncopated pulsation of a triad and a unison A in the accompaniment, and the cadenza, where the cello takes on the quiet pulsation and the orchestra gently highlights the harmonies here and there, as though in sympathy. The Aeolian harp has a liminal quality to it: timbre that spills into notatable music and then washes back again into timbre. Perhaps with further study, this instrument could provide the opposite of a musical text, or better yet, a counterbalance to our textual loyalty.

Working with the Consone Quartet, both on the arrangement and on the album, has been an ineffable joy. They play with a probing intelligence and deep musical sympathy, for one another, for their collaborators, and for the music. The quartet have made their own study of early Romantic chamber arrangements, supported by the Continuo Foundation for their Barnstorming! concert video series, and when we met to workshop my arrangement of the Schumann Concerto, they quickly adjusted to this new orientation that privileged the right sounds over the right notes. It was their idea to pair this arrangement with Ries' arrangement of Beethoven, pulling the concerto and the sonata into the same genial social space. ■

– Kate Bennett Wadsworth

KATE BENNETT WADSWORTH

Cellist Kate Bennett Wadsworth is a scholar-performer with a fascination for the endless variety of ways that sound can intersect with meaning. She grew up in a house full of puns in Boston, USA, and spent most of her childhood trying to sound like her favourite singers on the cello (mostly Pavarotti), learning chamber music with her friends and an inspiring array of coaches, and learning how to say "I'm not crazy" in as many languages as possible. After completing a bachelor's degree in Scandinavian Studies at Harvard University, Kate went on to study modern cello with Laurence Lesser at the New England Conservatory, baroque cello with Jaap ter Linden in the Royal Dutch Conservatory in the

Hague, and 19th-century performance practice with Clive Brown at the University of Leeds.

Kate has appeared at festivals throughout Europe and North America with ensembles such as the Gabrieli Consort, B'Rock, Arion, Tafelmusik, Apollo's Fire, Masques, and the Academy of Ancient Music, and given lecture-recitals and masterclasses at the Juilliard School, the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, the Boston Conservatory, the Longy School of Music, and the Utrecht Early Music Festival. Her 2017 recording of the Brahms Cello Sonatas with pianist Yi-heng Yang, based on her study of Brahms-circle performance practices and collaborative edition with Clive Brown and Neal Peres da Costa, was praised for its "narrative quality" (Gramophone) and its "ardor and depth" (Early Music America). Kate has also produced critically acclaimed discs as a member of Trio Ilona, which performs 19th-century piano trios on period instruments, and Ensemble Unmeasured, a core group of continuo players with invited soloists. This album is the result of a three-year research project on the Schumann Cello Concerto called "The Flexible Text: reuniting oral and written traditions in 19th-century music", funded by the Leverhulme

PHOTO BY HANNAH SHIELDS

Trust and hosted by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Other facets of the project included a book chapter for the Orpheus Institute and a critical edition of the Schumann Concerto, both in its original forms (cello and orchestra, cello and piano) and in Kate's arrangement for cello and string quartet, all published by Bärenreiter in 2024.

Since 2018, Kate has run the Deux-Elles label, together with her husband, Matthew Wadsworth. They live in Norwich, UK, where Kate directs ▸

the dynamic ensemble, Norwich Baroque, while commuting to London to supervise graduate students at the Guildhall School. She is currently embarking on a practice-led research project on Aeolian harps as a guiding paradigm for Romantic-era sound. ■

"Her sense of musical gesture and line has the strength and grace of a wild animal: Her melodies soar, not like a rocket, but like an eagle, responding to every turn of harmony and thought the way the bird responds to changing currents of air."
-Early Music America

CONSONE QUARTET

The first period instrument string quartet to be selected as BBC New Generation Artists, the Consone Quartet are fast making a name for themselves with their honest and expressive interpretations of repertoire, notably from the classical and romantic eras.

Formed at the Royal College of Music in London, the Consone Quartet launched their professional career in 2015, shortly after which they were awarded two prizes at the 2015 York Early Music International Young Artists Competition, including the EUBO Development Trust Prize and a place on the EEEmerging Scheme in France. They went on to win the 2016 Royal Over-Seas League Ensemble Prize, and in 2022 were awarded a prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust (BBT) fellowship.

The quartet has been enthusiastically received at London's major venues, as well as further afield in Poland, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Bulgaria and Slovenia. Festival invitations include Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Dartington, Two Moors, Buxton, MA Festival in Bruges, Heidelberger Streichquartettfest, and Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Germany. In 2024 the quartet returned to the English Haydn Festival and the York Early Music Festival, both of which are loyal supporters and regularly host the group. Consone are Artists-in-Residence at Paxton House (2023-2025) and at Saxon Shore Early Music Kenardington

PHOTO BY MATTHEW JOHNSON

(2024-2027). Following tours of South America (2018) and Canada (2023) the quartet will return to North America in 2025 to perform both alone and in collaboration with pianist Kristian Bezuidenhout.

2023 saw the Consone Quartet premiere a new work for string sextet by Gavin Bryars, commissioned by friends of the Quartet, the Borletti-Buitoni Trust and BBC Radio 3. The work, entitled "The Bridges of Königsberg", was broadcast on Radio 3 from St Martin-in- the-Fields in October 2023. They will further their exploration of contemporary music with the premiere of a new work for string quartet by Oliver Leith in summer 2025.

Education work remains a core interest to the group, having worked with students at the Royal College of Music in London, Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, as Hans Keller fellows for 2020-2022. 2024 sees the beginning of a new partnership with the Frost Trust as "Visiting Quartet" at Sheffield's Music in the Round.

The quartet's debut recording explored music by Haydn and Mendelssohn and was described by The Strad as an album "that instantly leaps out of the stereo at you as something special." In Spring 2023 they released the first CD in a complete cycle of Mendelssohn's string quartets with Linn Records. The album, featuring both the "1823" and Op. 44 No. 3 quartets, has been described as "top-notch" (Allmusic) and "exquisite" (Pizzicato). ■

deux-elles

DXL1205

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Sonata for Piano and Cello in F Major, Op. 5 No. 1,
arr. Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838)

1 *Adagio sostenuto* 2:43
2 *Allegro* 15:11
3 *Allegro vivace* 7:44

Agata Daraškaite & Magdalena Loth-Hill, violin | Elitsa Bogdanova, viola
George Ross & Kate Bennett Wadsworth, cello

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Cello Concerto in A Minor, Op. 129, arr. Kate Bennett Wadsworth

4 *Nicht zu schnell* 10:11
5 *Langsam* 3:10
6 *Sehr lebhaft* 7:57

Kate Bennett Wadsworth, solo cello | Consone Quartet

Total playing time: 46:56

Engineers Matthew Wadsworth & Isa Khan | **Producer** Nicholas Parker
Photography Hannah Shields & Matthew Johnson | **Cover & booklet design** Tim A'Court
Many thanks to the Leverhulme Trust, Alfred Richter, and Douglas Woodfull-Harris for their support of the research for this project
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