

The Magazine of the International Society of Bassists



# BASS WORLD





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*The Magazine of the International Society of Bassists*

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Departments		Features	
President's Corner	2	5	100 Days to ISB 2017
Different Strokes	7	17	COPYRIGHT – Some “Bass-ics”
Teaching Tips	11	21	Double Bass Parts for String Quintets of the 18th and 19th Centuries?
Body & Bass	15		
In The Zone	27	53	New Members-Only Benefit: 2015 Convention Videos
Luthier's Corner	31		
Rumblings	35		
All That Jazz	39		
The Latest Score	44		
Young Bassist's Page	51		
Sounding Board	54		



### *about the cover...*

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# Double Bass Parts for String Quintets of the 18th and 19th Centuries?

by Michael Montgomery

Whenever and wherever students of the double bass gather with heterogeneous groups of string players, whether at summer festivals and camps, conferences and conventions, or music schools, they can more than likely count on seeing friends form themselves into string quartets - and bassists (of course) are not invited! Many of us have probably wished there was some larger repertory we and our students could tap into, or thought to ourselves, "Can't we find or adapt works that would allow the addition of the double bass to those string quartets our colleagues form?" Typically though, when we look at a quintet scored for five string players, it is a second viola that is added to the quartet, not a double bass. Examples include the six string quintets Mozart composed between 1773 and 1791, and Beethoven's String Quintet No. 2, Op. 29, of 1801. But what about a string quintet with a fifth part written specifically for the double bass?

## A String Quintet from Antonin Dvorák

Though Antonín Dvorák also composed a two viola string quintet many years later (1893, his Op. 97), many a bassist is more than happy that his String Quintet of 1875, Op. 77 in G major, is indeed scored for two violins, viola, cello, double bass – it is one of the best loved staples of our chamber music repertoire! We find this little comment in the foreword from the title page of the N. Simrock edition of 1888: "The specific advantage the structure gains by the use of the [double bass] is the changed function of the violoncello, exposing this in its most lovely quality as a tenor of the ensemble."

So... where do we bassists turn to find more works with this instrumentation? This question had special significance for me this year when I found myself working with a talented

Excerpts from the bass part of Dvorak's String Quintet, Op. 77 (1875)

*Allegro con fuoco*

*f* *cresc.* *f* *ff* *f* *p* *dim.*

*The bass part to this quintet, which is often orchestral in character, extends only once into thumb position to a high B-flat. Its range is:*

group of high school string students – though they were initially intent on forming a quartet, I was able to interest them in exploring repertory that would include a double bass. We decided to look at several “two cello” string quintets from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the intention of possibly adapting the second cello part to be played on the double bass.

### The String Quintets of Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf

We bassists are more than familiar with the concerti Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf (1839-1799) composed for our instrument. Born in Vienna, Austria, he began his studies on the violin at age six and within a few years began to play with orchestras in the area. At age twenty-four he became acquainted with the famous opera composer Gluck, and then in the following year with Franz Joseph Haydn. According to one account from tenor Michael Kelly, Haydn, Dittersdorf, Mozart, and Vanhal once played in a string quartet together: “Storace gave a quartet party to his friends. The players were tolerable; not one of them excelled [more than the others] on the instrument he played... I was there, and a greater treat, or a more remarkable one, cannot be imagined.” Ditters accepted a position as court composer at Johannesberg in the Czech Republic in 1771, and was given a noble title, Dittersdorf, in 1773, thereby becoming Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf. Dittersdorf died in 1799, having written some 120 symphonies, oratorios, cantatas, chamber music, piano pieces, and a number of concertos, including the two for double bass.

In 1782, Dittersdorf composed a set of six string quintets, writing for two celli rather than two violas. Many high school bass students will feel comfortable playing the second cello part of the G major quintet (No.6, available from International Music Company) on double bass at the written pitch - the range falls entirely within the double bass half and first positions (with the exception of several notes below our low “E” that must still be played 8<sup>va</sup>). When transposed an octave higher (i.e., played at actual

pitch), the part still lies within a comfortable double bass range (highest note will be “B” an octave and a third above our open “G” string) and may be of interest for more advanced students. A quick search turned up two other quintets from this set: a modern edition of the A major quintet is carried by Edition Peters and a 1948 edition (Leipzig: Pro Musica Verlag) of the C major may be found at International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP.org).

### The String Quintets of Luigi Boccherini

About the time Mozart, Dittersdorf, and Beethoven were writing their quintets, cello virtuoso Luigi Boccherini (born 1743 in Lucca, Italy– died in 1805 in Madrid, Spain) was developing a VERY large body of repertory with potential (to my mind at least) for double bassists: he wrote over 100 quintets scored for two violins, viola, and two celli. I performed the second cello part of one of his quintets some years ago with members of the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra and have since longed for a chance to revisit these gems.

The forces that helped to shape Boccherini’s style can perhaps be traced to the variety of places he lived during his life. Born and raised in Italy, between 1757 and 1763 he made several trips to Vienna, where he and his double bassist father Leopoldo were employed in the theater orchestra at the Kärntnertor. During these trips, Boccherini apparently had opportunities to display his virtuosity as a soloist, catching the attention of the Spanish ambassador. He moved to Madrid in 1761 when he was employed by Infante Luis Antonio, the younger brother of King Charles III of Spain. The influence of Spanish popular music is found in many of his compositions. While in Spain he often worked with the Font family (the father and three sons of which formed a string quartet between them), playing the first cello part of his two cello quintets with them. In fact, over half of his compositions were quintets. Guitar was a favorite instrument of the Spanish aristocrats, and a dozen of Boccherini’s quintets from this period include guitar. Frederick William II of Prussia was

Excerpts from cello II part of Dittersdorf’s Quintetto No. 6 (1782), transposed 8<sup>va</sup> for double bass.

*The cello II part of Dittersdorf’s String Quintet No. 6 is often accompanimental in nature. When transposed an octave higher, the range is quite comfortable for the double bass:*

also a patron: when he ascended to the throne upon the death of his uncle Frederick the Great in 1786, he began to commission Boccherini to write quartets and quintets for him, paying an annual salary. It is not clear, however, that Boccherini actually lived in or even went to Prussia during this time.

It was in 1771 that the first of Boccherini's string quintets, his Opp. 10 and 11 (published in 1775), were written while the composer was living in Spain. In these (two cello) quintets, the first cello takes on the role AND the register (see the Dvorak comment above) of the second viola of the more traditional instrumentation, and indeed we find in many editions of these quintets a second viola part (probably added by his publisher, Pleyel, who was also a composer and known to have taken liberties with Boccherini's music) presented as an alternate for the first cello part. If the stories of Boccherini's virtuosity are to be believed, he would have had no trouble playing the cello in the viola register.

Many double bass students will more than likely have studied one of the cello sonatas of Boccherini. Only six were published during Boccherini's lifetime (1772). Collected in a volume entitled "Six Sonatas for the Violoncello composed by L. Boccherini," they include G.1, 4-6, 10, and 13. "Sonata in G Major", edited by Lucas Drew for Double Bass, is the third of this collection (G.5, composed in 1766), and "Sonata No. 6," edited by Stuart Sankey, is the sixth (G.13). Any student who has studied these will be familiar with the style and potential level of difficulty of Boccherini's cello parts. The good news for us bassists is that many of the secondo cello parts, though in a somewhat higher register and often a bit more difficult than those of Dittersdorf, are still playable

on the double bass. Again, advanced students looking for a challenge might try playing portions of these parts in the cello register (reading the written notes 8<sup>va</sup>) while less advanced students might enjoy playing them just as written (adjusting only for those notes below the double bass range).

It is believed that the three quintets of Boccherini's Op. 39, composed in 1787 and published 1809-1813, were scored for a double bass rather than second cello. The Italian chamber ensemble La Magnifica Comunità, who recorded nine volumes of Boccherini's String Quintets (BrilliantClassics.com) between 2005 and 2011, has recorded the Op. 39 quintets with double bassist Nicola Domeniconi beautifully playing the fifth part. Grove Music states that the instrumentation is 2 violins, viola, cello, and double bass (with no mention of alternative instrumentation). In Pleyel's first edition published in Paris in 1809, however, the low basso part is labeled "Violoncello 2<sup>o</sup>," and in the Ricordi edition published in Milan in 1949 it is also labeled "Violoncello II." The parts in both editions consistently descend to the D and C notes of the lowest string of the cello. Whatever the case, we bassists might be excused for wishing to play the second cello part on Boccherini's quintets – Luigi's double bass playing father Leopoldo was, after all, Boccherini's first teacher. It is thought by some that Boccherini's quintets may have planted a seed for those of Mozart and Beethoven.

Boccherini died in poverty in Spain, and it was not until 1927 that his remains were moved back to his birthplace of Lucca in Italy. Though the French musicologist Yves Gérard (in the Gérard catalog published in London in 1969) lists over 580 works by Boccherini, after his death

Excerpt from cello II part of Boccherini's String Quintet Op. 11, No. 6 (G276), adapted for bass.

Due to the frequent high register and quick flourishes characteristic of Boccherini's style of writing for the cello, these parts can be quite challenging for the bassist, especially when 8<sup>va</sup>.

his music had been largely forgotten. Styles had changed and concerts were performed for larger audiences. As pianos were built to sound louder, instruments in the string family followed suit, and the intimate, delicate sounds of music such as Boccherini's began to fall out of style. With renewed interest in period music, however, Boccherini is being rediscovered by many musicians, such as Rome's Quintetto Boccherini, whose founding members, when they came across a complete collection of the first edition of Luigi Boccherini's 141 string quintets in Paris in 1949, began to champion his music. The Municipality of Lucca's Higher Institute for Music Studies, on the bicentennial of the birth of Luigi Boccherini – February 19th, 1943 – changed its name to The Istituto Superiore di Studi Musicali "Luigi Boccherini", taking on the name of the "world renowned musician." Boccherini is back, and so are many of his quintets, "cleaned up" in modern editions by publishers that include International, Kalmus and Ricordi. (Older out-of-print editions may be found at IMSLP.org.)

#### The String Quintets of George Onslow

A collection of twenty-one of George Onslow's (1784-1853) String Quintets was published in 1840 by the firm of Troupenas, founded in Paris by Eugène-Théodore Troupenas (1799-1850). After Troupenas' death in 1850, the firm was acquired by Brandus & Cie. By the time they had changed their name to G. Brandus & S. Dufour in 1858, this publication had grown to include all of the thirty-four quintets Onslow had written during his lifetime.

Though born in Clermont-Ferrand (central France) to a French mother, Onslow was descended from English aristocracy (George's paternal great-great grandfather was Speaker of the House of Commons). Onslow studied piano with Johann Baptist Cramer and Jan Ladislav Dušek and composition with Anton Reicha. Though quite

famous in his own lifetime, his music fell into oblivion after the First World War. There is now a renewed interest in his compositions, especially his string quartets and quintets, most of which, like Boccherini's, were scored for string quartet with a second cello (Nos. 1, 3, 32, 33, and 34 included a second viola). Some think it is possible Onslow's early quintets were an inspiration for Schubert's String Quintet, Op. 163 (1828).

Though the Breitkopf and Härtel first editions of the early quintets (Nos. 1-10) ambiguously label the fifth part "basso," this term was used to refer to the lowest cello part – later Brandus editions simply label this part "Violoncell 2<sup>o</sup>". Onslow did, however, begin to write an alternate double bass part (adapted from the second cello) for many of the later quintets (parts labeled "Contra-Basso" can be found in one dozen of the early editions of Onslow's quintets at IMSLP.org). This is usually attributed to double bass virtuoso Domenico Dragonetti's electrifying 1826 performance in the 10th quintet, Op. 32. We do not know if Dragonetti himself played the part to sound at the original cello pitch, but the later adapted double bass parts as often as not deviate little from the written range of the original second cello part. Considering the improvements in strings and advances in the level of playing our instrument over the past two centuries, bass students today might be excused if tempted to revisit those parts with an eye to playing more of the passages at pitch.

The SJ Music publishing house (Cambridge, United Kingdom), has published two of Onslow's cello quintets: Op. 38 ("La balle") and Op. 39. Baudime Jam, of the publishing house Editions du Mélophile, has begun work on a complete critical edition of Onslow's 36 quartets; we can only hope he follows up with the 34 quintets. The International Music Score Library Project, as well as The Royal Library (the National Library of Denmark and the Copenhagen University Library), have many complete scores and parts from the Breitkopf and Härtel first editions

#### Excerpts from Double Bass (cello II) part of Onslow's Quintetto No. 4, Op. 17

Allegro Espressivo ma non troppo

online that are ready to download. IMSLP has many of the later Troupenas/Brandus edition quintets online as well. If a modern edition of the bass parts Achille Gouffe (bass soloist with the Paris Opera and friend to Onslow) wrote for all thirty-four quintets could be had, this would also be a wonderful asset for bassists. (See Ali Kian Yazdanfar's well written Onslow article in Vol. 34, No. 1 of Bass World, for more resources.)

### The String Quintets of Franz Schubert

Though Franz Schubert (1797-1828) composed fifteen string quartets, he composed only two string quintets. The

Overture for String Quintet in C minor (D. 8), written in 1811, was scored for string quartet (two violins, viola, cello) with an added second viola (as were the quintets of Mozart and Beethoven) rather than two cellos. His String Quintet in C major (D. 956) was scored for two cellos, however. Composed in the summer of 1828, it was completed only weeks before his death on November 19. The first known performance took place some twenty-two years later on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1850, and it was first published soon after in 1853. A transcription for bass of the second cello part of the C Major Quintet for double bass, though it might be frowned upon by some, provides

A comparison of the cello II and alternate double bass parts of Onslow's Quintetto No. 11, Op. 33, m. 13-22 in the first edition, Breitkopf & Hartel, 1827-28.

**Allegro con brio**

Violoncello = Basso

Contrabasso

Op. 33 was the first quintet Onslow wrote AFTER hearing Dragonetti play the low cello part to his Op. 32. The range of the double bass part is first line G to third ledger line above the staff A:

Excerpts from the cello II part of Schubert's String Quintet, Op. 163 (1828), adapted for bass.

**Allegro ma non troppo**

The second cello part of Schubert's string quintet is often melodic, and much of it is comfortable at 8<sup>va</sup>.

us with one way to bring another well-known chamber work by this important composer to our repertory (the other two being his Piano Quintet in A major, D. 667, and Octet in F major, D. 803).

### So Why Not?

There is, of course, quite a bit of chamber music out there that incorporates the double bass. In addition to the Dvorak, string quintets that include original double bass parts have been composed by Giovanni Bottesini, Darius Milhaud, and Adolf Misek. Kalmus also lists several famous string quartets in their catalog, including those of Shostakovich (A5843), Borodin (A5973), Strauss (A6350), and Verdi (A4543), to which double bass ad libitum parts have been added by Lucas Drew. These works may be played by a quintet or string orchestra. Still, we bassists, when we think of the chamber music opportunities available to us and our students, particularly music from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, may sometimes feel discouraged. If we wish to further augment this repertory, we might consider adapting the second cello, or “basso,” parts of more of the “two cello” quintets from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

My high school “quartet plus added bass” has been enjoying Onslow’s String Quintet No. 4, Opus 17, which

they performed on a fall concert this year, as well as Schubert’s String Quintet in C major, D. 956, slated for a spring performance, and has singled out Boccherini’s String Quintet No. 6 (“Bird Sanctuary”) of Op. 11 to add to our repertory. Just over a year ago I observed a young lady play a transcription for double bass of a movement from one of the Bach Cello Suites in a master class for Francois Rabbath. Mr. Rabbath was of course very complimentary when she was done, but I will never forget that he finished his comments with this: “I think that we must now play the Suites at pitch – it is time.” And so, as is often conceded, the level of bass playing has exploded in recent years – students of the double bass are probably ready to tackle this repertory.

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