

UNDERSTANDING GRUTZMACHER

written by David Johnstone

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GRUTZMACHER, Friedrich *Wilhelm Ludwig*

Born: 1832 Dessau (Germany)

Died: 1903

Cellist, Composer, Transcriber

Grutzmacher was one of the outstanding names in cello performance in the second half of the nineteenth century, holding a glowing reputation that was heightened by his teaching successes, and by his musicological work. Rather like the story of Fitzenhagen (and the 'Rococo Variations'), the name of Grutzmacher has since suffered somewhat due to the rebuke, in many quarters, of his 're-working' of the Boccherini Cello Concerto in Bb Major and also of other works. However, his intentions were certainly noble in principle – he wished to substitute what he saw as simple unimportant salon pieces that were flourishing in that age with larger substantial works that bore some real weight on the concert platform. Until this point fine, but what actually occurred is that he 'disfigured' many classical works with his own romantically chromatic harmonies and part-writing that is today seen to be totally out-of-place, given present day knowledge of baroque and classical period playing and performance practices. However, one has to accept that these were the tastes of the time, something 'Victorian', and on that basis evaluate his contribution to the cello. I wish to present firstly his life, and then offer some interesting information on his style of playing, his compositions and arrangements, and also comment as to his teaching work.

Friedrich Wilhelm Grutzmacher was born in Dessau, Germany, and received his first lessons from his father, who was a member of the Ducal Orchestra. Soon he began studying with Dotzauer's pupil, Dreschler, and so was to receive tuition from the most important cello lineage then available. Indeed Dreschler was a valuable gain for the artistic life of the Court of Saxony. By the age of 16, and with the basic formation complete, Grutzmacher travelled to Leipzig. At first he had joined the orchestra of a private choral society so as to become more accustomed to orchestral playing, but his obvious talent was soon blossoming and he was invited to play as a soloist in the Euterpe Concerts, choosing the 'Variations' of Francomme as his official debut (February, 1849).

From there on, by ability and by luck, he very quickly stamped his authority on the Leipzig musical scene during his twelve years of residency there. Firstly, we must return to the previous year (1848) when he was discovered in Leipzig by the famous violinist, Ferdinand David, who arranged several concerts for him. These were so successful that one could then almost speak of him being David's protégé, and in due course he became a member of the David String Quartet. Meanwhile, another important German cellist called Bernhard Cossman had been invited, also in 1848, to become the principal cellist in the Gewandhaus Orchestra and to be cello professor in the conservatoire (in so doing, displacing a misfortunate less competent cellist).

However, after only two years, Cossman left both posts in order to take up an offer in Weimar, and it was the young Grutzmacher - aged only 18 years - who became in 1850 the new principal cellist in the Leipzig theatre orchestra, the Gewandhaus Concerts, and professor at the Conservatory there. Quickly becoming acknowledged as the leading figure on the cello in Leipzig, he was aware of his own possibilities and strove to continue improving himself.

In 1860 he moved to Dresden to become principal cellist of the Court Orchestra - the Hofkapelle solocellist - and head of the Dresden Musical Society. He was basically viewed as Kummer's successor - Kummer was a most worthy teacher of the older school, with important technical publications, as well as some delightful pieces for cello. From this period, Grutzmacher first started making extensive European concert tours as soloist. We know he played throughout Germany, Holland, England, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, and Russia, and was received just about everywhere with triumph. Incidentally, in Russia, where he made two long tours in 1878 and in 1884, he became a good friend of the famous cellist Karl Davidov (or *Davidoff*) - see a separate article about him in *johnstone-music* - who in the opinion of many was the most virtuoso cellist of all in that era. However, for Grutzmacher, the city of Dresden was to be thought of as his firm base, and in 1877 he became a professor at the Dresden Conservatory. He also received from the King of Saxony the title of Chamber Virtuoso; he was also appointed Royal Concert leader, and yet later, on his twenty-fifth jubilee of service (1895) he was dutifully specially honoured. He died in 1903.

By all accounts, Grutzmacher's playing was of the highest order. Critics spoke of a total mastery of technical problems – especially the very thorough training of the left-hand, combined with musical refinement and sensitive expression. Above all the words 'solidity', 'dominance' and even somewhat 'academic' sprang to mind – these were features of the 'Dresden' school, and which date from Romberg, the Duport brothers, and Dotzauer himself. Grutzmacher's 'cantilena' melodies were very expressive, but there was a limited use of vibrato. Left-hand portamento was frequent, especially in larger shifts of position. However, not only as a virtuoso soloist did he shine as exceedingly solid, but his ample theoretical knowledge also made him an excellent interpreter of chamber music, and his string quartet playing was also renowned. Not surprisingly then, for many years he was in continuous and widespread demand.

Like most of the virtuosos of his time, he found the time and inspiration to produce a large number of compositions. Many of these were published. Those which were perhaps the most famous might include his two Cello Concertos – in A minor, Op. 10 and in E Minor, Op. 46, the Hungarian Fantasia (Op. 7), the Nocturne (Op. 82), the Scherzo (Op. 30), three songs with cello obligato (Op.50), and the Transcriptions of Classical Music (Op. 60). Unfortunately, apart from many transcriptions (see later in the article) these works are now seldom, if ever, performed professionally. As pedagogical important material one should especially make mention of the *Daily Exercises* (edited by Hugo Becker and published in 1909, after his death) and the *Hohe Schule des Violoncellspiels*, (published 1891 in Leipzig). I am assuming that these 1891 pieces were what today we call the 24 Studies, Op.38 in two volumes and which are widely used in conservatoires – volume I without thumb positions but with very useful bowing patterns that still well serve the present day orchestral cellist, and volume II consisting of highly virtuoso thumb position work that still severely tests the best of today's solo virtuoso cellists!

All this compositional work, and in what one might term as in more up-to-date (=romantic) styles, led him to involve himself with some major composers of the day. It was he who supposedly gave the world premiere performance of Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote* in Cologne in 1898, though some now claim it may have in fact been his son Friedrich (born 1866, and who by that date had been principal cello of the Budapest orchestra and from 1894 professor in Cologne).

The Cello Sonata of Grieg enjoyed an illustrious beginning; the composer himself performed it with Grutzmacher, and then with Julius Klengel, and the young Pablo Casals. Strangely, it fell somewhat out of favour in the 20th century, and took a long time before a commercial recording appeared of the work. His premiere performance of Schumann is shortly mentioned beneath.

It was in the world of the transcribers, arrangers, investigators where Grutzmacher clearly went much further than any other cellist in history up to that point. He was well conscious of his mission, and his confidence was high; he even wrote about his own editions "*My main purpose has been to reflect and determine what these masters might have been thinking and to set down all that they, themselves, could have indicated down to the smallest detail. . . . Relying on my long musical experience, I feel I have more right than all the others to do this work.*" Up to a certain extent he was absolutely correct. For example, he had premiered the Schumann Five Pieces in Folk Style with Clara Schumann at the piano. His cello versions of other works of Robert Schumann – namely the Fantasy Pieces (originally for clarinet), the Adagio and Allegro (originally for horn), and the Three Romances (originally for oboe) received approval from the Schumann household. Unfortunately though, in other areas he went a step too far with his personal criteria.

Grützmacher had also decided to undertake a large project on by reorganizing, rearranging, and almost 'recomposing' the J.S. Bach Cello Suites by adding his own chords, passages, and embellishments to form a "concert" edition. This might seem so surprising (probably irritant, or even downright 'butchery') to us today, but he truly believed that he was doing a good service. One has to remember this period at large – even Robert Schumann saw fit to write piano accompaniments to the Cello Suites of J.S. Bach so as to sound more 'complete' on the concert platform! This work of Grutzmacher, undertaken in 1866, also transported the 6th Suite from D Major to G Major! However, during his own lifetime I think that Grutzmacher realized his 'excesses' in this work, and just before the turn of the new century was to make a further edition, this time with far greater respect for the original work of Bach, cutting well down on the extra chording, and taken away many of the decorative passage-work that was already difficult to defend to the newer cellists emerging. However, one has to wait to the next generation, to names like Klengel, Becker, and finally Casals, to find people who wished to do justice to the suites just as they were 'originally' intended ... however, it remains true that Grutzmacher, like Piatti, wished to fill more concerts with noble works of stature, and in thus doing cutting down on the 'delightful' miniatures.

If we need further confirmation as to the practices of the period, then surely this entry from the Grove Musical Encyclopaedia of 1880 should leave us in no doubts:

"We are also indebted to him [Grutzmacher] for many careful editions of standard works (Beethoven's Sonatas for Pianoforte and Cello, Romberg's Concertos, Boccherini's Sonatas, etc., etc.) and for the revival of some forgotten works of considerable interest."

Obviously musical tastes have changed nearly full circle. Interestingly, the inclusion of Romberg as standard repertoire then made sense, taking into account his very long performing life, concert tours, and pedagogical prowess, but his concertos are rarely used today, even in the teaching class. Apparently the posthumous 10th Romberg concerto was not only edited but partially arranged by Grutzmacher.

We can say with confidence that he went much farther than any other cellist in the search for worthwhile repertoire for the cello – simply consider the following list of works we know he arranged!

Haydn – various sonatas

Mozart – various sonatas (*including the Bassoon/Cello Sonata for Cello and Piano, introducing late romantic chromatic harmonies*)

Beethoven – at least one sonata

Schumann - various sonatas

the two Beethoven Violin Romances Op.40 and Op.50

Schumann's "Kinderscenen" (originally piano)

the Thirty-six "Songs without Words" of Mendelssohn

some twelve other selected Piano pieces by Schumann and Chopin

the Violin Sonata (Op. 19) and the Romance (Op. 44) by Rubinstein

the "Pensees fugitives" by Stephen Heller and Ernst

Additionally, Grutzmacher also arranged some cello quartet music, perhaps for his own cello classes, and one can find delightful arrangements of fragments of Wagner – from 'Lohengrin' and 'Parsifal' – which certainly should be an obligatory part of repertoire for today's cello quartet ensembles!

The following Grutzmacher editions were also known to have been published with the addition of careful annotations:-

Two Gamba Sonatas of Johann Sebastian Bach, as well as his six Violoncello Suites (as mentioned previously)

a Gamba Sonata by Handel

a Gamba Sonata by C.P.E. Bach

Six Boccherini Sonatas with the addition of a piano accompaniment

a Sonata by Bonifazio Asioli

varied original Violoncello Compositions of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Chopin

a "Theme Russe varie" by Ferdinand Ries

the ten Concertos and six easy Instruction Pieces for Violoncello by Bernhard Romberg

Twelve Exercises by Dotzauer (Op. 107), with the addition of a second violoncello part.

A selection of studies from past cello masters (including names like Berteau, Boccherini, Duport, Breval and Romberg)

He also wrote effective cadenzas to the Haydn D Major concerto.

All these multi-versatile aspects to his career made him the obvious choice as a teacher for the then younger generation of cellists. One can clearly see that the famous 'Dresden' school of cello playing, which can be said to have been founded by Dotzauer, and developed by Kummer, arrived at its utmost maturity and glory with Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig Grutzmacher. Amongst his many, many important pupils are Fitzenhagen, famed for his thumb position virtuoso playing, and a composer of delightful cello pieces but alas today too readily sneered at for the part he played in the Tchaikovsky Roco Variations (please do see a separate article on Fitzenhagen in *johnstone-music*), and Hugo Becker (also with a featured article!), who took Germany into the modern cello age of the twentieth century, concluding important investigation on the aesthetics and psychology of cello playing. Other (slightly earlier) students included Kahnt, Wilfert, Hilpert, Hegar and his own brother Leopold. Emil Hegar, for example, was later to become the principal cellist in the Gewandhaus Orchestra. As an anecdote, Carl Davidoff (1838–89) was to succeed Grutzmacher as professor at the Leipzig Conservatory at 22 years old, but one should bear in mind that the principal teaching work of Grutzmacher happened later in his Dresden years.

GRUTZMACHER AND THE BOCCHERINI CONCERTO

Perhaps the most famous incident of why Grutzmacher is perhaps 'wrongly' remembered by musicologists today is for his 'mutilations' of some of the classical works, and especially that of the "Boccherini" Concerto in B-flat story. This story relates to 1895, with Grutzmacher already a household name. In order to promote the work of Boccherini, then little known, he maintained a classical orchestration of strings, 2 oboes and two horns, but proceeded to cut sections up – in total from four different Boccherini works. The originally main first movement melody he tried to 'clean up', subtly changing the rhythmic precision. The double-stoppings, for example, from the 'development' is taken from another concerto, whilst in the slow movement he was unable to resist 'transplanting' the whole movement from yet another concerto. The cadenzas are marvellous, if you like the rest of the work, for they are totally integrated thematically to the rest of the Grutzmacher/Boccherini movement in question. This edition is still in widespread use today, for many (both cellists and audience) find it a much more popular and effective proposition to programme than the 'original' as such, much as a few purists might hate the alternative even existing. The positive aspect of Grutzmacher's creativity is that he brought Boccherini into the public view. Without this attention, the composer would have been remembered for very little during the half century following Grutzmacher's death.

How does one actually credit the *Bb* major concerto? In the original version there is, of course, no problem, as Boccherini's name appears alone. But the 'Grutzmacher' version, a version that tends to offend the purist whilst appealing to most cellists, is of interest for its Victorian perception, and as a reflection of how 'classical' music was then considered (almost a historical document in itself, now that we are in the twenty-first century?). We should not call this version simply 'Grutzmacher's Cello Concerto', out of respect for Boccherini's original themes; indeed, in today's world, such insensitivity might well result in judicial action by the original composer and by the Performing Rights Society. However, crediting Boccherini only would not seem wholly fair either. Therefore, the present writer would strongly suggest:- 'Boccherini-Grutzmacher: Concerto in *Bb* Major' ... as the fairest and least controversial title, thus avoiding arguments on both sides of the fence ... There should surely be a place for both *Bb* concertos, side by side, in the twentieth-first century.



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Op.6 – Piano Trio (vln-vlc-pno)

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Op.9 - 10 morceaux en style national (10 Stücke im Nationalstil) cello and piano

Op.10 - Concerto (No.1) Cello and Orchestra in A Major (1st printing Hofmeister, Leipzig 1854)

Op.13 - Erinnerung an Leipzig (Memory of Leipzig) for cello and piano (1st printing Hannover, Nagel ca.1860)

Op.18 - Diabolina. Polka de Concert for cello and piano

Op.33 - Große Concert-Fantasie über Themen aus der romantischen Oper "Santa Chiara" Cello and Orchestra (String quartet or piano) (1st print Braunschweig: Litolff, ca.1860)

Op.42 - Concerto No.2 in G Major for Violoncello and Orchestra (Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig 1858)

Op.46 - Concerto No.3 in E minor for Violoncello and Orchestra (Leipzig: Kahnt, 1859)

Works without Opus

Concert Overture

String Quartet

Hungarian Fantasia

Variations on an original theme

Romances

SUMMING UP

In a very special manner Grutzmacher is deserving of the highest merit by his successful method of instruction in violoncello playing. He is widely accepted, in historical perspective, to be the single most important cello professor from the whole of the nineteenth century. As we have seen, he was also a fantastic performer, whose performances as both soloist and in chamber music was revered. At the same time he had a most solid orchestral experience. He also achieved fame as a composer, and as an arranger and editor. He was quite simply the most all-round cellist the world had ever seen up to that point, and who has rarely been equalled since. As a result, his almost mythical status is almost guaranteed with future generations – it is undeniable that he will for ever remain a major figure in violoncello history.

DAVID JOHNSTONE



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