

THE LATE-ROMANTIC GERMAN CELLO SCHOOL – AN INTRODUCTION TO JULIUS KLENGEL AND HIS COMPOSITIONS

written by David Johnstone

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KLENGEL, Julius

Born: 1859, 24th September (Leipzig)

Died: 1933, 27th October (Leipzig)

Julius Klengel, one of the most important German cellists and famous teachers of the Romantic age and beyond, was born in the musically active city of Leipzig. At the turn of the twentieth century Germany had consolidated itself as the foremost cello school of the world. This was especially due to the historic line of the 'Dresden' cello school - founded by Dotzauer, then taken over by Kummer, and through to Grutzmacher - all in Dresden. Grutzmacher died in 1905, leaving the mantle, as it were, to two younger eminent German cellists: Julius Klengel (born 1859 in Leipzig) and Hugo Becker (born 1864 in Alsace). They were both linked by their school's certain common features - both were known representatives of the school and thus "children" of Grutzmacher. As such, they shared similar artistic tastes such as the austerity of interpretation, a rather academic style of playing, and a fully developed interest in teaching and compilation of teaching aids and editions. Apart from being recognized as fine solo and chamber performers, they were to become the most prominent German cello teachers during the first thirty years of the twentieth century, albeit with very different teaching methods and opinions on music. One could say that they formed two summits of the German art of the cello. However, in this article it is Julius Klengel who is the main focus (for those interested in Hugo Becker please turn to a separate article). The idea is not to simply write a biographical note, but to try and portray something of his relationships with fellow composers, his successful teaching school, and the compositions that he himself wrote.

Julius Klengel, born in 1859, was the son of a lawyer, who also happened to be a fine amateur musician. There were already several generations of musicians in his family, and his father had even been a close friend of Mendelssohn. So, naturally, young Julius first studied cello with his father, and then followed several years with Emil Hegar, the principal cellist in the Gewandhaus Orchestra, until he suffered poor health. Hegar had been himself a pupil of Grutzmacher and Davidov. The young Klengel did not look for a further teacher at that point, but Davidov in especial made a profound influence to his playing. Klengel later made a thorough study of Davydov's works, and more than once asked the Russian cellist for advice during his tours of Germany and when in St. Petersburg. He wrote *"Only since I visited St. Petersburg did I realize what playing on the cello really is"*.

Leipzig was perhaps the finest musical city in the world in that era. Mendelssohn had founded the conservatoire and the Leipzig orchestra enjoyed an unrivalled reputation as the world's foremost orchestra. The atmosphere of the city was full with instrumental music – strangely opera played little part there – for example, it was also the home to the most famous German publisher Breitkopf and Härtel. So in this wonderful climate Julius Klengel, although without a formal teacher, continued to undertake his studies very seriously, and at only 15 he became a member of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. At 17 he made his solo concerto debut playing the first concerto of Davidov. Then aged only 22 (in 1881) he became solo cellist there (which would have corresponded to one of the two principal cellists). This gave him the impulse to shortly afterwards begin his solo concert career, first in Germany and from 1878 on, in other countries including Russia. In 1880 he premiered his own first Cello Concerto successfully. From that point he had opportunities to perform as soloist with the Gewandhaus orchestra once or twice every season, until about 1906 when his solo appearances became a little less frequent. Klengel often performed in Russia, and indeed was the first cellist to perform the Haydn D Major Concerto there. He remained with the orchestra until 1924, playing under the prestigious successors of Mendelssohn – Reinecke, Nikisch and Furtwängler. He had an open mind, but was rather reserved about the new music appearing in his last years with the orchestra - one has to appreciate that for a conservative romantic as was Klengel, Stravinsky must have come as a shock! When Klengel made his farewell to the orchestra in 1924, a double concerto for violin, cello and orchestra – especially written by Klengel himself – was featured, with Klengel as one of the soloists and Furtwängler conducting. Strangely enough, his grandfather had also served in the same orchestra during fifty years!

Amongst his favourite participations in chamber music groupings was the Gewandhaus Quartet, led by the violinist Adolf Brodsky (to whom Tchaikovsky had dedicated his Violin concerto). He also played a piano trio with Brodsky and Tanjeev. The Swiss-born cellist Hans Münch-Holland (1899–1971) was to succeed Julius Klengel in the Gewandhaus Quartet.

His tone was considered to be strong, penetrating, and clear; but it seems that his least strong point was the actual singing quality of that tone, which, though effective in its projection to the audience, was somewhat lacking in beauty. Paradoxically, his performances were highly musical, making their effects by subtleties of accentuation and phrasing, and by the most regular 'portamentos' which he still used in his last years despite the taste changing quite considerably amongst the younger artists.

He wrote many compositions for the cello, though few of them are in the standard performing repertoire anymore; at least speaking of the general programming of orchestral and chamber concerts. However, pieces for cello solo, cello and piano, and multi-cello pieces fare much better. Nevertheless, Klengel is mostly remembered as a teacher today, and in this field his etudes and technical studies are widely used today in conservatoires and music schools. More in depth notes of this will be found later in the article.

Klengel was in close contact with Brahms, Rubenstein, Reger and other composers of his era. Max Reger dedicated to Klengel one of his solo suites for violoncello (in G Major, Op. 131, No. 1), and one of his sonatas for cello and piano - Op. 116. It must be worth mentioning that Reger also frequently performed with the cellist, becoming even more of an influence on Klengel than Brahms. Unfortunately Reger died, still quite young, in 1916. The A minor sonata for cello and piano of Grieg enjoyed an illustrious beginning; the composer performed it with cellists Friedrich Wilhelm Grutzmacher, Julius Klengel, and the young Pablo Casals. It fell somewhat out of favour in the 20th century - there being no early commercial recordings of the work.

One of Klengel's major assets for his time was his editions of J.S. Bach's cello suites and the viola da gamba sonatas. In fact, he taught the Cello Suites to virtually all his students, and can be truly credited with reviving Bach's six suites, rebuking those who somehow wish to promote Casals with 'rediscovering' the suites. He also edited concertos by Haydn, Romberg, Schumann, Davidov, and Volkmann, with masterly cadenzas always added. For example, Volkmann wrote four different cadenzas to his concerto but Klengel's own cadenza (alongside with Popper's) was preferred! He also produced edited versions of the sonatas by Brahms, which clearly indicated his good artistic taste.

In 1881 he was appointed a professor at the Leipzig Conservatory. In later years his teaching work became more and more important to him, remaining in the conservatoire until the year of his death. Klengel's cello playing is generally considered a continuation of the Dresden School from Grützmacher. As we have mentioned, Klengel became cello professor at the Leipzig Conservatory. However, Klengel was not only a cellist, but a fine pianist. It was well known that Klengel could accompany his pupils on the piano, playing everything from memory. His knowledge of chamber music was vast, and he knew every part of each instrument in most of the standard repertoire.

His students included:

Emanuel Feuermann
Paul Grümmer
Guilhermina Suggia
Henri Honneger
Edmund Kurtz
William Pleeth
Gregor Piatigorsky
Joachim Stutschewsky
Ludwig Hoelscher
Rudolf Metzmacher
Christian Schlemüller
Grigorij Pecker
Konon Bloch
Jascha Bernstein
Mischa Schneider
Benar Heifetz

He was much loved by his students, although often it is difficult to lay a finger on exactly what produces the 'magic' of a class which in turn feeds to produce a series of great cellists.

Gregor Piatigorsky, who had spent a short and unhappy time with Hugo Becker; said about his switch to Klengel in his autobiography:

"Julius Klengel was short and old. His beard was stained around his mouth from smoking cigars. He smoked one when I met him. His eyes laughed. He did not ask what I would like to play; he just went to the piano and began the Haydn Concerto [D major - the C major was not discovered until after the Second World War]. We went through the entire work and he was pleased to hear me play his cadenzas ...

His system was simple. He would remark, 'Schneider's vibrato is marvellous.' Everyone would come to "spy" on Schneider's vibrato. To Schneider he would say, 'Auber's trill is the best.' It worked. The students, though jealous, learned from each other and made progress. I marvelled at Klengel's art of teaching by really not teaching. At lessons one seldom heard suggestions or discourses on music from him. He let a student play a piece to the end and said, 'Fine' or in a severe case, 'Watch your left arm, young man.'"



Klengel's Cello Class - Leipzig, 1921.

William Pleeth remained grateful to Klengel during his entire life. He said that Klengel was a wonderful teacher because he allowed someone to be himself. He wanted everyone to develop their own musicality – no copying any other artist. Klengel himself was a very simple, unsophisticated man whose integrity was unquestionable. Pleeth concluded that he was always honest and he was obviously loved for it.

In 1917 Emmanuel went to study with Julius Klengel. In accepting Feuermann as his pupil, he remarked on the fact that the boy had a very small repertoire, so Feuermann began to soak up training, music, and general knowledge. Klengel divided his day into numerous practice sessions - each with specific functions. Furthermore, he supervised his student's work in music theory, piano practice, and building a cellist repertoire. He interspersed this with avid reading, for he had realized his general education had been neglected. What an amazing result was produced from Klengel's teaching!



Julius Klengel

He wrote several teaching compositions which still retain some of their value. Among them are: Technical Exercises in all Keys (1909) - methodically arranged exercises for the development of finger and bowing technique - and Daily Exercises (dating from 1911).

As a composer, and competing against the giant romantics of the day, one has to be fair and say that his creative invention was limited, but he was astute and clever in never going beyond what he felt his compositional abilities could comfortably do. Therefore his work displays a polished craftsmanship, and are scholarly but yet melodically warm to the listener.

His cello compositions are often, but not always, difficult. Some of his chamber works are even very simple. He tried, above all, to write performance 'music' and not 'academically-based' music, and this whilst being recognized as a conservative of the times. Perhaps this is the real secret as to why Klengel's name fares much better on concert programmes than do nearly all his contemporary cellist-composers. There is generally a great rendering of the A string melody, and faster passage-work on the A-string, rather in the Davidoff school of thought. Some pieces so favoured the very highest register that Adolf Brodsky once offered to transcribe a Klengel piece for violin - but an octave lower!

I am going to proceed with a main list of his works, and with frequent small notes of interest attached. Luckily a fair amount of this material is still widely in print, and well worth the effort of obtaining:-

List of compositions by Julius Klengel

Works with Opus number

Op.1, Suite in E minor for cello and piano

Op.2, Three Pieces for Cello and Piano

Op.3, Capriccio in F major for Cello and Piano

Op.4, Cello Concerto No.1 in A minor

Written in 1880, when he was already a professional orchestral player. He took his mould from the model of Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, with direct influences such as a low pedal note from the soloist whilst the orchestra introduced the second theme. The concerto is dedicated to Carl Davidoff.

Op.5, 2 pieces for 4 cellos

No.1 Serenade

No.2 Humoresque

Two delightful pieces, full of charisma and elegance. The first cello is frequently in the thumb positions, but is very playable for competent cellists.

Op.6, Scherzo in F Major for cello and piano

A virtuoso work.

Op.7, Concertino No.1 in C Major for cello and piano

Still regularly used today, for the full structural sense of the work gives the student pleasure, whilst only involving the 6th and 7th positions at the higher register (but not thumb positions). It was dedicated to Hans Patzki, a Klengel student.

Op.8, Intermezzo and Mazurka for Cello and Piano

Op.9, Nocturne in D major for Cello and Piano

Op.10, Concertpieces (Konzertstück) in D minor for cello and piano

Generally known as 'Konzertstucke'. Perhaps this provided a subconscious model for Dohnanyi in his Konzertstucke of 1904, for in both works a full-blooded first movement leads to a cantilena slow part, and then what follows is not so much as a third movement as a reworking of the material from the first movement once more. It is much harder for the student than the Op. 7 Concertino. Was there once an orchestral version, perhaps by string orchestra? – if not, a present day orchestration would seem a logical step to the editor...

Op.11, Six Pieces for Cello and Piano

Op.12, Polonaise in A minor for Cello and Piano

Op.13, Gavotte in re minor for Cello and Piano

Op.14, Mazurka in A minor for cello and piano

Op.15, Variations for 4 cellos

Op.16, Konzert-Etüde in D minor

- Op.17, Humoresque in C major for Cello and Piano
Op.18, 2nd Tarentelle in E minor for Cello and Piano
Op.19, Variations in A minor for cello and piano
Op.20, Cello Concerto No.2 in D minor
Op.21, String Quartet in G minor
Op.22, Suite in D minor for 2 cellos

A full-scale serious concert work for two cellos.

- Op.23, Sonata in B minor for Cello and Piano
Op.24, Serenade in F major for string orchestra
Op.25, Piano Trio

- Op.26, Six Pieces for cello and piano

1) Lied ohne Worte, 2) Gavotte, 3) Intermezzo, 4) Wiegenlied,
5) Barcarole, 6) Scherzino

- Op.27, Caprice in F major for cello and piano

Another virtuoso work.

- Op.28, Theme with Variations for 4 cellos

Rather more difficult than the Op.5 quartet pieces.

- Op.29, 6 Pieces for Cello and Piano

- Op.30, Impromptu for 4 cellos

An impromptu on well-known themes (well-known in the early 20th century that is), finishing with a brilliant and virtuoso rendition of the Mendelssohn 'Wedding March'!

- Op.31, Cello Concerto No.3 in A minor

- Op.32, Sarabande in C major for Cello and Piano

- Op.33, Four Pieces for 4 cellos

1) Song without Words, 2) Gavotte, 3) Lullaby, 4) March

These form a charismatic set of concert pieces

- Op.34, String Quartet in A major

- Op.35, Two Piano Trios for Children (Kindertrios)

No.1 C major, No.2 G major

All kindertrios are marvellously thought-out pieces in brief movements for violin, cello and piano. All three parts are quite straight-forward – geared to general average level children of just a few years experience (obviously depending on individual cases), in a 'Mozartian' language. A most worthwhile introduction to chamber music playing.

Op.36, Concert Overture

Op.37, Cello Concerto No.4 in B minor

This concerto of 1903 sometimes used to be claimed as the best German romantic cello concerto after Schumann; perhaps a slight exaggeration, but it is certainly one of Klengel's best works and deserves the chance to shine in concerts once again.

Op.38, Six Pieces for Cello and Piano

Op.39, Two Piano Trios for Children (Kindertrios)

No.1 F major, No.2 D major

All kindertrios are marvellously thought-out pieces in brief movements for violin, cello and piano. All three parts are quite straight-forward – geared to general average level children of just a few years experience (obviously depending on individual cases), in a 'Mozartian' language. A most worthwhile introduction to chamber music playing.

Op.40, Suite No.2 in A minor for cello and piano

Op.41, Concertino No.2 in G Major for cello and piano

Op.42, Two Piano Trios for Children (Kindertrios)

No.1 E minor, No.2 G minor

See note from Opus 39 ...

Op.43, "Caprice in the Form of a Chaconne after a Theme by Schumann" for solo cello

A wonderful solo cello work, written in 1905. Formerly used as a competition set work at international cello competitions, this tests even the very best! The theme used is the Introduction to the Third Violin Sonata Op.121 of Robert Schumann, and Klengel produces some 24 variations which unleash virtually nearly all the known virtuoso cello possibilities of his time. Highly virtuoso and very 'German'. Dedicated to his student Guilhermina Suggia.

Op.44 Six Pieces for cello and piano

1) Romanze, 2) Alter Tanz., 3) Wiegenlied, 4) Mazurka, 5) Gavotte,
6) Savoyard

Op.45, Double Concerto in E minor for 2 cellos

This was premiered in December, 1912, by Klengel and his daughter Eva, with the Gewandhaus Orchestra conducted by Nikisch. It is perhaps surprising that it is not more frequently scheduled, given the general comradeship of cellists!

Op.46, Concertino No.3 in A minor for cello and piano

Op.47, Sonatine C major No.1 for cello and piano

Op.48, Sonatina No.1 in C minor

Another marvellous work for the music school. A small sonata of Brahmsian influence and harmonies. Well rounded, and with a poignant Sarabande as second movement. The cello part does not enter the higher A string registers. The piano part is not at all difficult either.

Op.51, Andante sostenuto for cello and orchestra

Op.54, Suite for cello and organ

Op.56, Suite for Cello in D minor

Op.57 Hymnus for 12 cellos

This was dedicated to the memory of Arthur Nikisch, and the first performance was given by his students in the funeral. Klengel had followed the model of the Davidov, who some fifty years earlier had written a Hymn for ten cellos, two double-basses and timpani.

Op.59, Small Suite for 3 cellos

Op.61, Concerto for Violin and Cello and orchestra

Op.62, 3 pieces for 2 cellos and piano (organ)

Works without Opus number

Chant sans Paroles for cello and piano

Cadenza and Conclusion for the cello concerto by R. Volkmann (Op.33) for cello and piano

Technical Studies in all keys (Vols. I and II)

Tägliche Übungen (Daily Exercises), Books I, II and III

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